the weekly Standard

SEPTEMBER 22, 2008 • $4.95

YOUR WEEKLY PALIN FIX
BARNES • HAYWARD
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THE PASSION OF DICK CHENEY

The vice president fishes the Snake River with MATT LABASH

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—William G. Howell, Martin R. West, and Paul E. Peterson

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Both candidates were mainly taught at home

Whether it is the image of Abraham Lincoln studying by log cabin candlelight or George Washington dutifully copying the *Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation* into his schoolboy notebooks, presidential schooling has long been a national fascination. Today we have a graduate of Columbia College and Harvard Law (Barack Obama) taking on a graduate of the Naval Academy and National War College (McCain) But it is the early schooling—how did they get there?—that is most fascinating.

—Peter Meyer

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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At Least He Gives of Himself

The Scrapbook's heart goes out to Joe Biden. He's about to be raked over the coals by the media for his level of charitable giving, just as Dick Cheney was eight years ago.

Cheney, you may recall, was criticized for being "meager" and less than generous with his gifts. Over a 10-year period, the Cheneys had donated an average of just 2.14 percent of their income to charity. Adam "Big Time" Clymer of the *New York Times*, noting that Cheney was a multimillionaire, asked him at the time, "What do you think is a proper level of giving for someone who has millions of dollars, in terms of percentage?" Cheney replied: "I think that's a choice that individuals have to make in terms of what they want to do with their resources. It's not a policy question. It's a private matter. It's a matter of private choice."

The Scrapbook agrees. If you will indulge us, we will repeat here what we said in September 2000:

"The Scrapbook considers it an appalling invasion of privacy, not to mention an invitation to the worst sort of Tartuffery, that we require our political leaders to disclose their charitable giving in their tax forms. But given that we do, last week's anti-Cheney frenzy in the press was amazingly onesided. In our Nexis search, only four of the 162 stories we turned up mentioned the Gores' embarrassing 1997 tax returns, which showed a total of $353 in giving from an income of almost $200,000."

Ebenezer Biden

Year	Annual Gross Income (AGI)	Tax Paid	Charitable Gifts	Gifts as % of AGI
2007	$319,853	$66,273	$995	**0.31%**
2006	$248,859	$42,832	$380	**0.15%**
2005	$321,379	$70,473	$380	**0.12%**
2004	$234,271	$41,845	$380	**0.16%**
2003	$231,375	$38,393	$260	**0.11%**
2002	$227,811	$41,756	$260	**0.11%**
2001	$220,712	$40,728	$360	**0.16%**
2000	$219,953	$42,313	$360	**0.16%**
1999	$210,797	$40,309	$120	**0.06%**
1998	$215,432	$35,131	$195	**0.09%**

SOURCE: TaxProf Blog

Given how harshly the media judged the Cheneys, you can well imagine what the Bidens are now in for. Because a decade's worth of their tax returns, made public by the Obama-Biden campaign on September 12, showed that they reported giving less than two-tenths of one percent of their income to charity.

As Paul L. Caron noted at the TaxProf Blog (from which we drew the figures for the chart here), "It is jarring that a couple earning over $200,000 per year would give as little as $2 per week to charity. This giving compares very unfavorably to John McCain, whose tax returns show that he gave 27.3%-28.6% of his income to charity in 2006-2007. During the same period, the Obamas' tax returns show that they gave 5.8%-6.1% of their income to charity."

A Biden spokesman pointed out that he and his wife "do volunteer work with military families." And, we would add, Biden has made a gift of himself to his country. Who can put a dollar figure on that? If you're keeping score at home, the Bidens' rate of giving is *one-tenth* that of the Cheneys. So you can imagine how the reporters are going to dog the senator from Delaware in the coming days. As we go to press, the *New York Times* hasn't yet turned its big guns on the good ship Biden, but we're sure it's only a matter of time. ♦

Good Grief

Now that Barack Obama has been shown to be vulnerable, The Scrapbook is ready to dust off one of its favorite political theories: Namely, when Democratic presidential candidates sink in the polls, their supporters undergo a psychic process not unlike Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's famous "five stages of grief."

Kübler-Ross wrote a popular book in the late 1960s called *On Death and Dying* in which she declared that terminal patients move through five separate emotional experiences—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—when they learn that they cannot live. Frankly, we have our doubts about Dr. Kübler-Ross, but we have to admit that there are certain parallels in the politico-journalistic world.

Consider present circumstances. In the two weeks since the Republican National Convention and the emergence of Sarah Palin, John McCain's poll numbers have gone up and Barack Obama's have declined—in some instances, putting McCain ahead of Obama, and still rising. For the media, which have invested so much in Senator Obama, this may not be the equivalent of a death sentence, but it's something

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(Classic Steiner, reprinted from our issue of March 29, 2004)

like being scheduled for hemorrhoid surgery. Accordingly, our favorite pundits have lately been combining denial with anger, and showing no signs of moving into the bargaining phase.

You need only read two of our favorite *Washington Post* columnists—Eugene Robinson and E.J. Dionne Jr.—at random to see what THE SCRAPBOOK means. "Every day, the McCain campaign brays anew with over-the-top indignation at 'the outrageous attacks' on Palin's family," fumes Robinson. "McCain," writes Dionne through clenched teeth, "is running a disgraceful, dishonorable campaign of distraction and diversion." (How dethpicable!)

Readers should bear in mind that, in the world as seen by Robinson, Dionne, and friends, Ronald Reagan won the presidency by hypnotizing the electorate with his acting skills, George H.W. Bush beat Michael Dukakis with the help of Willie Horton and the ACLU, and George W. Bush booby-trapped Al Gore's voting machines and "swift-boated" John Kerry.

The problem is that after Democrats arrive at the depression stage—think the morning after Election Day 2004—they stay there indefinitely, or worse, never emerge from the anger period. And in THE SCRAPBOOK's experience, there is a point at which that anger is directed away from the Republican and straight at the disappointing Democratic candidate. You might call this the sixth stage of Democratic grief: recrimination. This happened to poor Michael Dukakis in 1988, and it certainly explains the furious complaints that John Kerry failed to respond to criticism four years ago.

So THE SCRAPBOOK's advice to Senator Obama is this: Watch your back. You've had an amazing four years of press adulation, *Newsweek* covers, and emotional tributes to your sacred qualities. But if the polls continue to fall, and your candidacy looks terminal, the fury that turns E.J. Dionne Jr. red in the face may soon be turned against the candidate of hope and change. ♦

Author, Author!

A tip of THE SCRAPBOOK homburg to two of our stellar contributors: Peter Steiner, whose wry cartoons have adorned this page for many years; and Stephen Schwartz, whose passionate prose has informed STANDARD readers on subjects as diverse as Arthur Miller and Iranian politics.

Peter has just published his second thriller, *L'Assassin* (St. Martin's, 288 pp., $24.95), which, like his earlier *French Country Murder*, features the ex-CIA operative Louis Morgon, who has retired to a quiet village in the French countryside where he finds that all the wine and cheese in the world cannot insulate him from his shadowy past. Stephen's latest is *The Other Islam: Sufism and the Road to Global Harmony* (Doubleday, 288 pp., $24.95), a fascinating guide to the mystical side of Islam and a key to understanding a reformed faith that is truly a "religion of peace."

THE SCRAPBOOK, in its customary way, devoured both books in a single sitting, and attests that you'll learn things you didn't know in Stephen Schwartz's *The Other Islam* and won't soon forget the twists and turns of *L'Assassin*. ♦

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Casual

Scoop!

It must be hard for people under 35 to imagine how large dog mess (as I am constrained to call it) once loomed in the day-to-day life of the nation. Not the metaphorical kind, which retains its privileged position in the fine arts and political oratory, but the actual stuff, as dropped by real canines.

Thirty years ago, dogs did run free. Evidence of their freedom steamed on every lawn and sidewalk. Any stroll was an obstacle course. Most families kept something sharp and disposable around the house—like old Popsicle sticks—for scraping shoes clean. As a nine-year-old racing around with the soundtrack of *This Week in Pro Football* pulsing in my head, I ended a lot of my imaginary touchdown dives covered in something other than glory. People really did make out a lot in public parks in the 1970s. But they had a good look around first.

With New York State's landmark Canine Waste Law of 1978, soon imitated across the country, things changed. Those so-called pooper-scooper laws were conceived as "ecological," because environmentalism back then was obstinately commonsensical. Clean and green were synonyms. Rivers, forests, and fields could be rescued through the same kind of tidying up that we were enjoined to lavish on our living rooms. Reasoning by blockheaded syllogism, authorities asked: Why would you let your dog do anything on the sidewalk that you wouldn't do on the carpet in front of your TV?

Clean and green, of course, are not always synonyms. Sometimes they are opposites. Assuming each of the 61 million dogs in the country makes two bathroom trips a day, the main effect of making their owners scoop up after them has been to create the need for 1.5 trillion extra plastic bags.

And just because lawns suddenly became places you could gambol on barefoot did not mean the argument ended. Au contraire. The problem was that the law changed dog mess from something dropped at random by dogs into something distributed purposefully by humans. To no one's surprise, the stuff turns out to be even less pleasant when you are holding a hot baggy of it than when you are contemplating it on your neighbor's lawn. So, with Yankee ingenuity, dog-walkers devised a practical solution: heaving the whole mess into someone else's garbage and forgetting about it.

HAL MAYFORTH

You have to get up pretty early to catch a dog-walker in the act. One moment, they're stooping behind Rover with a plastic bag, as the law requires. The next moment, they've gone all furtive. They glance up at the windows of the surrounding houses and move towards one that has no lights on. They crane around the side of the house, to see if there's a bin, bucket, or flower pot not too embarrassingly far down the driveway.

Every gesture betrays a bad conscience. They approach with the bag-hand held stiffly on their hip, like a quarterback on a bootleg. If you surprise them they will say they were admiring your rhododendrons, even if you don't have rhododendrons. Sometimes they leave their present on top of the trash-can lid, presumably for fear that the sound of opening it might wake someone. Would any of them, I wonder, stop the car after a family trip to Popeye's, and dump all the half-finished tubs of coleslaw and red beans, all the dripping drumsticks and stained wet-naps, into your trash can?

Maybe they would. Garbage is a funny kind of property. Its owner has renounced his claim to it, but it has neither disappeared nor become the property of somebody else. In the hands of rogue politicians, secret police, and common criminals, this is the rationalization for sinister invasions of privacy. The dog-owner's rationalization is more like a smelly version of the "paradox of the heap" described by the philosopher Eubulides: How many grains of sand do you have to remove from a heap before what remains is a heap no longer? Just as it doesn't change the nature of a pile of garbage to remove a beat-up toaster, they reason, it won't change its nature to lob in a few of Fido's turds.

But on humid summer weekends, when the hum from all the dog mess our neighbors have secreted in our driveway over the past week wafts up to the porch where I'm having lunch, I confess it does strike me that the nature of my garbage has changed. I mean that only in an olfactory sense, though, and maybe I'm wrong. Maybe if we could get over our scruples about garbage cans being no place for waste, we could strike a real blow for the environment. We might even use the toilet less and save on the water bill. Remind me which driveway is yours again?

Christopher Caldwell

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the weekly Standard

Mad Libs

The liberal media are angry. Very, very angry. How do we know? Howard Kurtz, the *Washington Post*'s chronicler of all things media, says so:

> The media are getting mad. Whether it's the latest back-and-forth over attack ads, the silly lipstick flap or the continuing debate over Sarah and sexism, you can just feel the tension level rising several notches. Maybe it's a sense that this is crunch time, that the election is on the line, that the press is being manipulated (not that there's anything new about that).

Of course, politicians are always trying to manipulate the media. And the liberal media are always allowing themselves to be manipulated by liberal politicians. So why the foot-stamping snit by liberal journalists? Not because "the press is being manipulated." Rather, because the American people are resisting manipulation by the media.

For, as Kurtz goes on to say, the media "are increasingly challenging false or questionable claims by the McCain campaign." In other words, the media are going after McCain. In his piece Kurtz cites two allegedly false claims from McCain ads that are in fact basically true—or, at least, no more one-sided than dozens of other campaign ads. Back when Barack Obama was coasting toward victory, normal campaign exaggerations ("You know, John McCain wants to continue a war in Iraq perhaps as long as 100 years") didn't fill the media with loathing for Obama. Now the McCain camp's exaggerations do.

Why? Because McCain is doing well. And because Sarah Palin is surviving—even flourishing—in the midst of the liberal media onslaught.

When the media get mad, they don't just pout. They pounce. How? By any means necessary. The day of Kurtz's article, September 11, ABC's Charlie Gibson conducted his first interview of Sarah Palin. Gibson asked: "You said recently, in your old church, 'Our national leaders are sending U.S. soldiers on a task that is from God.' Are we fighting a holy war?"

Palin responded, "You know, I don't know if that was my exact quote."

"Exact words," Gibson triumphantly retorted.

Not so fast. As Palin explained, quite eloquently, what she was saying was in the spirit of Lincoln: "Let us not pray that God is on our side in a war or any other time, but let us pray that we are on God's side." The tape of Palin's church appearance bore out her interpretation and revealed Gibson's mischaracterization. "Pray for our military men and women," she had said, "who are striving to do what is right. Also, for this country, that our leaders, our national leaders, are sending [U.S. soldiers] out on a task that is from God." Gibson had made it sound as if Palin were claiming to know God's will, rather than praying that U.S. actions might be in accord with God's will and in a cause worthy of God's blessing.

No doubt the mere fact of Palin's asking for any kind of blessing on our troops and our national leaders at some backwoods Alaska church was sufficiently distracting to the scripters of Gibson's questions that they didn't look closely at the wording. God knows (so to speak) what they believe at a place like that! Why, their kids probably even enlist in the Army to fight our enemies.

Speaking of enemies: Within hours of the ABC interview, the *Washington Post* distorted straightforward remarks made by Palin that same day to U.S. soldiers deploying to Iraq. She praised them for going over to help "defend the innocent from the enemies who planned and carried out and rejoiced in the death of thousands of Americans." Palin clearly meant that our soldiers would be fighting Al Qaeda in Iraq—a group connected to the al Qaeda central command responsible for 9/11. The *Post* claimed to believe that Palin was asserting a connection between Saddam Hussein and 9/11—as if she thought soldiers now heading to Iraq were going to fight Saddam's regime—and triumphantly noted that even the Bush administration no longer asserted such a connection (it never did, in fact).

Palin's remarks should have been unexceptional: We've been fighting Al Qaeda in Iraq for several years now. But the media are desperate to try to make her look foolish. In the same interview, she praised Ronald Reagan for having won the Cold War. What a gaffe, some media watchdogs barked. The Soviet Union didn't collapse until three years after Reagan left office! Gotcha!

Not a chance. Sarah Palin is quickly proving to be more than a match for the mad, mad media. Having foolishly started a war with her that they can't win, the liberal media would be well advised, for once, to implement their own favorite war-fighting strategy: cut and run.

—*William Kristol*

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Give 'em Hell, Sarah

Like Truman, a natural-born executive

BY STEVE HAYWARD

DAVE MALAN

Lurking just below the surface of the second-guessing about Sarah Palin's fitness to be president is the serious question of whether we still believe in the American people's capacity for self-government, what we mean when we affirm that all American citizens are equal, and whether we tacitly believe there are distinct classes of citizens and that American government at the highest levels is an elite occupation.

Steven F. Hayward is F.K. Weyerhaeuser Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and the author of The Age of Reagan: The Conservative Counter-Revolution, 1980-1989, *to be published in early 2009.*

It is incomplete to view the controversy over Palin's suitability for high office just in ideological or cultural terms, as most of the commentary has done. Doubts about Palin have come not just from the left but from across the political spectrum, some of them from conservatives like David Frum, Charles Krauthammer, and George Will. Nor is this a new question. To the contrary, Palin's ascent revives issues and arguments about self-government that raged at the time of the American founding and before. Indeed, the basic problems of the few and the many, and the sources of wisdom and virtue in politics, stretch back to antiquity.

American political thought since its earliest days has been ambiguous or conflicted about the existence and character of a "natural aristocracy" of governing talent. If the ghosts of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams are watching the storm over Palin, they must surely be revisiting their famous dialogue about America's governing class. Adams's widely misunderstood argument that there should perhaps be an explicit recognition and provision for an aristocratic class finds its reprise in the snobbery that greeted Palin's arrival on the scene. It's not just that she didn't go to Harvard; she's never been on *Meet the Press*; she hasn't participated in Aspen Institute seminars or attended the World Economic Forum. She hasn't been brought into the slipstream of the establishment by which we unofficially certify our highest leaders.

The issue is not whether the establishment would let such a person as Palin cross the bar into the certified political class, but whether regular citizens of this republic have the skill and ability to control the levers of government without having first joined the certified political class. But this begs an even more troublesome question: If we implicitly think uncertified citizens are unfit for the highest offices, why do we trust those same citizens to select our highest officers through free elections?

In his reply to Adams, Jefferson expressed more confidence that political virtue and capacity for government were not the special province of a recognized aristocratic class, but that *aristoi* (natural aristocrats) could be found among citizens of all kinds: "It would have been inconsistent in creation to have formed man for the social state, and not to have provided virtue and wisdom enough to manage the concerns of the society." Jefferson, moreover, trusted ordinary citizens to recognize political virtue in their fellow citizens: "Leave to the citizens the free election and separation of the *aristoi* from the pseudo-*aristoi*, of the

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wheat from the chaff. In general they will elect the really good and wise."

Today's establishment doubts this. The establishment is affronted by the idea that an ordinary hockey mom—a mere citizen—might be just as capable of running the country as a long-time member of the Council on Foreign Relations. This closed-shop attitude is exactly what both Jefferson and Adams set themselves against; they wanted a republic where talent and public spirit would find easy access to the establishment.

Part of what bothers the establishment about Palin is her seeming insouciance toward public office. Her success with voters, and in national office, would be an affront and a reproach to establishment self-importance. Anyone who affects making it look easy surely lacks gravitas and must not grasp the complexity or depth of modern political problems. Partly this is the self-justification for establishment institutions and attitudes, but partly it represents the substantive view that the size and complexity of modern government require a level of expertise beyond the reach of ordinary citizens. Some of the doubts about Palin are doubts about self-government itself.

So far no one has picked up on the significance of Palin's invocation of Harry Truman in her convention speech. Her reference was more than just a bridge to a heartland-versus-Beltway theme. Truman, recall, was the only president of the 20th century who was not a college graduate. Less than two months after abruptly taking over from FDR with no preparation, Truman wrote his wife Bess describing his quick progress in taking the reins:

> It won't be long before I can sit back and study the whole picture and tell 'em what is to be done in each department. When things come to that stage there'll be no more to this job than there was to running Jackson County and not any more worry.

In retrospect it is clear that Truman "got it." He didn't need any more "experience" to master the job. "Well I'm facing another tall day as usual," he ended that letter to Bess; "But I like 'em that way."

Ronald Reagan evinced the same attitude toward office as Truman and Palin. In fact, on closer inspection, one can hear in the criticism of Palin the echo of the same kind of complaint made against Ronald Reagan throughout his political career. Never mind that he'd been governor of California. That this graduate of Eureka College—*where?*—had made his career in Hollywood, a place as exotic and peculiar as Alaska, was decisive with the establishment. "Reagan's election," John P. Roche, a former head of Americans for Democratic Action, wrote in 1984, "was thus an 8-plus earthquake on the political Richter scale, and it sent a number of eminent statesmen—Republican and Democratic—into shock." It wasn't only liberals who found Reagan incomprehensible. "No previous president of the United States," Rowland Evans and Robert Novak wrote shortly after Reagan's election in 1980, "had so bizarre a preparation for political office."

Part of what bothers the establishment about Palin is her seeming insouciance toward public office. Her success with voters, and in national office, would be a reproach to establishment self-importance. Anyone who affects making it look easy surely lacks gravitas.

John Sears, whom Reagan had unceremoniously fired from his campaign in 1980, later put his finger on a key aspect of Reagan's strength:

> Since the primary prerequisite for handling the presidency is to ignore the immensity of it, a president must find the confidence to do so in self-knowledge. . . . Reagan knows himself better than most presidents and has kept his identity separate from politics. Reagan knows who he is and therefore he possesses the first prerequisite for being a good president.

In his third summit meeting with Gorbachev, Reagan wondered aloud what would happen if the two of them closed the doors to their office and just quietly slipped away: "How long would it be before people missed us?" Can one imagine Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton (or John McCain for that matter) wondering such a thing?

For Truman and Reagan the key ingredient to successful statecraft was simplicity. "I say there are simple answers to many of our problems—simple but hard," Reagan liked to say; "It's the complicated answer that's easy, because it avoids facing the hard moral issues." Churchill wrote that he immediately liked Truman when they met for the first time in Berlin in 1945 because he could see that Truman possessed the "obvious power of decision." We can see already from Palin's record—unseating a governor of her own party, delivering a long-blocked pipeline deal—that she shares this trait; another six years in the governor's office isn't likely to tell us anything we can't already discern if we don't let status bias get in the way.

Reagan and Truman forced their way into grudging acceptance and eventual recognition by the establishment through genuine and hard-earned political success, and Palin too will have to prove herself. She shows signs of sharing their humility, power of decision, and simplicity toward self-government.

In her first innings, Palin has offered a unique display of the capacity that John Adams described as the essence of a "natural aristocrat" in America: "By an aristocrat I mean every man who can command two votes—one besides his own." Here Adams was reminding us of the centrality of substantive persuasion in political life, something Republicans haven't been very good at of late. The talking heads of the establishment deprecated Palin's debut. "Sure, she gives a good speech, but . . ." They should be saying to Palin, "Welcome to the aristocracy, governor." ♦

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Palin the Pragmatic

Doctrinaire conservatives beware.

BY FRED BARNES

Conservatives are rushing to crown Alaska governor Sarah Palin as the new Ronald Reagan. And indeed there are similarities. Like Reagan, Palin has a dazzling star quality and an appeal to voters outside the conservative orbit. But there's another likeness to Reagan that conservatives may find a bit off-putting. She governs as a pragmatic conservative—with heavy emphasis on the pragmatic.

Palin, John McCain's vice presidential running mate, is a strong social and religious conservative. She opposes abortion and gay rights and, as an evangelical Christian, believes in a God-centered universe. But these matters are neither her top priorities as governor nor even her second-tier concerns. Her social conservatism has been muted.

Instead, her agenda since being elected governor in 2006 consists of oil and gas, taxes, and ethics reform. "Just look at the bills she put her name on," says John Bitney, her policy director during her first year as governor. "They speak for themselves." The bills involved a new arrangement for building a natural gas pipeline, higher taxes on oil companies, and new ethics rules covering the governor's administration and the legislature.

Those were her major initiatives. Next on Palin's list of priorities were maintaining the solvency of the pension program for teachers, cutting spending in the state's capital budget, and assuring that parents who home school their children aren't discriminated against by state regulations.

Palin has frequently voiced her support for anti-abortion bills requiring parental consent for girls under 17 and outlawing partial-birth abortions. "Alaskans know I am pro-life and have never wavered in my belief in the sanctity of every human life," she declared in April.

Her biggest task as governor has been to start construction of the gas pipeline to the lower 48 states. She tossed out the sweetheart contract her predecessor, Republican Frank Murkowski, had reached with three oil companies and negotiated a new deal with a Canadian company. The goal, she said, is 'to feed hungry markets.'

But she refused to introduce the pro-life measures in a special legislative session last spring devoted to the gas pipeline. "These issues are so important they shouldn't be diluted with oil and gas deliberations," she said.

Later, she declined to call a separate special session to take up the abortion bills. Her reasoning: Pro-lifers had failed to persuade her the bills could pass the state senate. Nor would she intervene to pressure two Republican senators who opposed the legislation to change their minds. Palin isn't willing "to jump out in front of the bus on things that aren't moveable" in the legislature, says state Republican chairman Randy Ruedrich.

Palin's conservatism, like Reagan's, has never been in doubt. When I talked to her last year, she described herself as "pro-business and pro-development." The *Anchorage Daily News* said the spending cuts she imposed in 2007 "may be the biggest single-year line-item veto total in state history." Of course, Palin is also pro-gun.

When she attended a governor's conference in Washington last February and was interviewed on C-SPAN by Steve Scully, she endorsed "across the board" tax cuts because Americans "know best" how to spend their own money. Palin said she's "committed" to making Alaska "more of a contributing state . . . and less reliant on the federal government."

Her biggest task as governor has been to start construction of the gas pipeline to the lower 48 states. She tossed out the sweetheart contract her predecessor, Republican Frank Murkowski, had reached with three oil companies and negotiated a new deal with a Canadian company. The goal, she said, is "to feed hungry markets in our state, reduce energy costs, help secure the nation, [and] flow that energy into hungry markets across the nation. That's my mission."

Her record as governor hardly qualifies her as a doctrinaire conservative. She proposed a graduated tax on oil as the price soared, then signed a bill passed by the legislature that set the new tax rate even higher. Reagan, by the way, cut taxes in 1981 and raised them the next year.

Why did Palin push a pipeline and favor a tax hike? Bitney says the answer is simple: Alaska needs more energy as older oil fields become depleted, and the pipeline will generate jobs and revenue. As for raising taxes, Palin follows the command of the state constitution to get the max-

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imum benefit from the state's natural resources.

Bitney says Palin never instructed her gubernatorial staff to "go after abortion" or any other issues of concern to social conservatives. In a campaign debate in 2006, she said that both evolution and creationism should be taught in public schools. "You know, don't be afraid of education," she said. "Healthy debate is so important and so valuable in our schools."

The next day she thought better of her comment. "I would not push the state board of education to add creation-based alternatives to the state's required curriculum," she said. But there shouldn't be "a prohibition against debate if [creationism] comes up in class."

As governor, Palin has appointed a commissioner of education and nine members of the state board—without applying a litmus test on creationism or evolution. And there's been no effort, either by Palin or her appointees, to add creationism to the curriculum.

Palin's most celebrated act of practical conservatism was killing the notorious Bridge to Nowhere in Ketchikan. She had endorsed it in a gubernatorial campaign debate, but changed her mind after being elected. By then, the project had become a symbol of wasteful spending, and the congressional earmark with money for it had been rescinded.

But the three members of Alaska's congressional delegation—Ted Stevens, Lisa Murkowski, and Don Young—still favored the project. Their expectation was that Palin would keep it alive with federal highway funds and state money. She refused.

The anointing of Palin as the new Reagan is surely premature. Let's say she's a potential Reagan. Like him, Palin has focused on a few big issues, while allowing others popular with conservatives to fall by the wayside. This brand of pragmatic conservatism worked for Reagan. It's worked for Palin too. ♦

'Time' Embraces a Timeless Idea

This is hardly the first call to national service.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

Time magazine, the superannuated newsweekly, seems to reinvent itself every few years with slackening energy, in one vain attempt after another to postpone its inevitable, rapidly approaching, and much-anticipated demise. Its most recent incarnation has largely dispensed with the snoozy business of gathering and conveying fresh information in favor of political advocacy. Not surprisingly, the ideology that the editors display is the boneless neoliberalism that most of the better-paid members of the journalistic class find comforting—not too left, not too right, but definitely more left than right. It's the kind of liberalism that considers itself practical, wised-up, unromantic. Neoliberals love it if you describe their views as "muscular."

"National service"—the idea that Americans would be better off if someone, preferably the federal government, paid them to volunteer to help one another—has always been big with neoliberals, and so now it's big with *Time* magazine. The editors devoted a special issue to the subject last year. And that was just the beginning, apparently. This week's issue of *Time* is also a national service extravaganza. It's billed as "the second annual community service issue," which means that we can expect national service issues at regular intervals until the editors get fired.

To promote the new issue, the magazine somehow convinced the two presidential candidates to appear back to back in a special TV forum, where they answered questions about national service lobbed at them by a *Time* editor named Richard Stengel and the PBS news personality Judy Woodruff. The forum was sponsored also by ServiceNation, a consortium of charitable groups whose leaders don't know that most Americans find the worn-out marketing ploy of jamming two capitalized words together either annoying or confusing. The show came to us live via the cable news networks from a stage at Columbia University.

Columbia was an ironic venue for a chin puller promoting national service. The most common and traditional form of serving the nation, needless to say, is soldiering: The modern American soldier does it all, performing the chores that liberals cheer—building schools in distant and godforsaken lands, handing out candy to children, changing diapers—while not neglecting the tasks that earn the undying admiration of conservatives, chiefly blowing things up. It's a nice mix of activities, sure to be a character-builder for anyone who tries it, and as service-oriented as anyone could ask for. Yet Columbia, like several other expensive universities, has banned military recruiters from its campus. Columbia's administrators evidently think you can carry this national service racket too far.

During the forum, the irony was noted by John McCain, who, it turns out, once served in the military himself (who knew?). "We're here in a wonderful institution," he said. "But do you know that this school will not allow ROTC on this campus? I don't think that's right." McCain has been a longtime advocate of national service, the niceties of which he pre-

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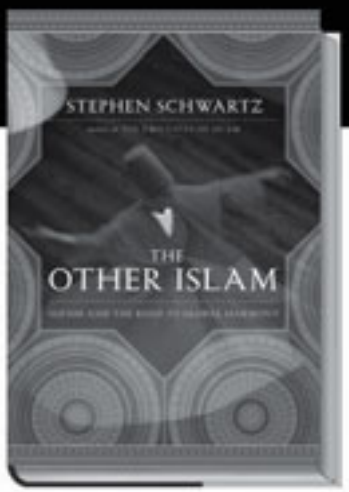
If you think peace-loving Muslims don't exist, you need to discover THE OTHER ISLAM



Author and journalist Stephen Schwartz uncovers the origins, practices, and beliefs of Sufism, a form of Islam he believes offers us the best hope for repairing one of the most perilous rifts of our time.

"More than an engaging introduction to Sufism… a roadmap for the kind of interreligious dialogue that can move the world beyond the clash of civilizations."
—GEORGE WEIGEL,
author of *Faith, Reason, and the War Against Jihadism*

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fers to leave undefined. His approach is typical of national-service advocates and is shared by his fellow candidate and enthusiast, Barack Obama, whose campaign has issued a "detailed" proposal for national service without saying too precisely what it is his newly minted national servants will be expected to do.

Though they don't like to admit it, our presidential candidates are taking their places in a familiar campaign tradition. "Whoever raises his right hand to take the oath of office as President next January," Stengel wrote in this week's *Time*, "will have already promised to make national service a priority for his Administration." Stengel seems to think this is a fresh development in American politics—otherwise he would have noted that his observation could have been made about every presidential election since 1988, when George H.W. Bush promised to mobilize his "thousand points of light" to serve the nation. The old Bush tried to keep his promise through an expansion of the Peace Corps and an endlessly touted "points of light" initiative to promote voluntarism in nearly every community he visited. Bush pretended his idea was something fresh, too—a "kinder, gentler" departure from that of his predecessor, Ronald Reagan, who, Bush failed to mention, had promoted a "voluntarism initiative" of his own for the eight years of his presidency.

Bush's opponent in 1992, Bill Clinton, pretended that Bush's efforts were nonexistent and vowed to establish a national service initiative called "AmeriCorps." Clinton's efforts did have the novel twist of adding another layer of bureaucracy that would pay people for the voluntary work the government had enlisted them to do. In 2000, Clinton's AmeriCorps was acknowledged but deemed ultimately inadequate by George W. Bush, who outdid his opponent Al Gore in his praise for the idea of community action, voluntarism, and national service.

And now, eight years later, this campaign's national service enthusiasts—our presidential candidates, the editors of *Time*, and the others—continue the tradition by pretending that the idea of national service is being newly revived, by them. It's an easy trick, since to succeed it requires only the perpetual amnesia of our country's political class. For example, both McCain and Obama scold the present President Bush for failing to implore his countrymen to community action in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in 2001. "Rather than tell the American people to shop," Obama said at Columbia, "what I would have done is to say, now is the time for us to meet some great challenges." If Bush had done that, Obama went on, "we would have had a different result."

But Bush did do that, and continues to do it. Bush calls his countrymen to "serve causes greater than self" so often it sometimes seems as if he's wound the phrase on a tape loop (he's used it dozens of times since 2001). He not only continued AmeriCorps, delivering dozens of impassioned speeches on its behalf, and tried to increase its size by a factor of five; he even added a few more corps of his own, including Senior Corps and Citizens Corps. Then he bundled them all under a supercorps called Freedom Corps. More to the point, in speeches following September 11, 2001, he said precisely what McCain and Obama tell us he didn't say: "My call tonight," he said in his State of the Union address in January 2002, "is for every American to commit at least two years—4,000 hours over the rest of your lifetime—to the service of your neighbors and your nation." He repeated the "call" in the next State of the Union address, and in countless speeches in between. "All of us," he said repeatedly, "can become a September 11 volunteer by making a commitment of service in our own communities."

It's too bad that our candidates today want to make believe this didn't happen. But you can see why they do. Bush pushed national service—and nothing happened. His experience, like Clinton's, like George H.W. Bush's, like Reagan's, suggests that

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national service, even with the support of a president, is a trickier business to pull off than a candidate might think. Then again, it might also suggest that "national service" mainly serves as a self-aggrandizing tool used during presidential campaigns, in hopes of lulling the public into believing that all their fellow citizens need in order to do good are the right federal programs, the right president, and the right magazine editors. ♦

The Obama Girls' School Days

The joys of private education.

BY SAM SCHULMAN

I am among those who have never fancied Barack Obama as presidential material. But I share with almost everyone the feeling that the nicest things about the Obamas are their daughters—adorable, charming, happy, and well-brought up. So I was delighted to see the Obama family attacked by a liberal in the *New York Times*, because I can display my disinterested gallantry—and school spirit—in their defense.

The perpetrator is Sandra Tsing Loh of the *Times*'s online "Education Watch." Despite Loh's interest in education and her superb liberal credentials (contributing editor at the *Atlantic* and a frequent "performer" on public radio shows), a big education factoid about our most liberal senator had until last week escaped her notice. She learned then that the Obama girls attend the private University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, of which I am an old boy. Loh's reaction was swift and urgent: "As a rabid public school Democrat, I crumpled in despair at the news." She also announced that, speaking as a Democrat, she is "horrified that Sarah Palin is the one who snagged the deeply profound—and absolutely ignored by professional smart people—emotional real estate of 'P.T.A. mother.'"

Loh's despair is as innocent—and as pure—as her politics. Sarah Palin notwithstanding, Malia and Sasha be damned—Loh really cares only about public schools, and how the Obamas' decision hurts them: "If Mr. and Mrs. Obama—a dynamic, Harvard-educated couple—had chosen public over private school, they could have lifted up not just their one local public school, but a family of schools." Loh has earned her opinion. She not only sends her own child to a Title I public school in Los Angeles but has written a "comic memoir" called *Mother on Fire* about the process. But does the fact the Obamas disagree with her entitle her to what she calls "huge grief-filled disappointment," which spills over hundreds of words—and drew more than 600 passionate comments in response?

The Laboratory School

DOUG MATTHEWS

Of course not. You don't have to be a conservative (though it helps) to disapprove of those who would force parents to raise children by political formula. Sending their children to the best school they can afford doesn't make the Obamas, the Bidens, the Clintons, the Gores, or the Tony Blairs selfish. Sending poor Amy Carter to Stevens Elementary in downtown Washington, D.C., didn't make Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter even a bit more saintly. There is no special duty in natural law, Torah, or *sharia* for parents to "lift up" the public schools, except by paying taxes. And if the private-school parents I mention oppose measures that would extend to others the luxury of school choice for their children, then there is certainly an irony here. It makes their arguments against school choice less persuasive; it ought to (but never does) cost them votes and political support. But irony, however abundant, doesn't turn human politicians into deliberately bad policymakers or wicked parents.

I think that even from Sandra Tsing Loh the Obamas deserve some consideration for their choice of private school. The Lab School and its high school, known as U-High, have a special role in Hyde Park, and a special place in the history of race relations in Chicago. The school has always had snob appeal—during the Depression, my grandmother sacrificed to send my aunt Patricia there (but not my mother, who lacked, Grandmother thought, a certain *je ne sais quoi*). Yet at the same time

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the school had a reputation for what would come to be called inclusiveness, but was then thought to be a social disadvantage for its conventionally WASP majority. So Ned Rorem ('40), undoubtedly U-High's greatest composer, observes repeatedly in his wonderful diaries and memoirs—often with repressed bitterness—that his contemporaries called it "Jew-High."

But most of all, Lab School has always—relatively speaking—welcomed the children of Chicago's black elite. Certainly by the beginning of the 1950s it stood out in this respect from other Chicago private schools (such as Bill Ayers's alma mater Lake Forest Academy). My class of 1967 was 13 percent black—and many of the black children began with me in first grade in 1956. During my extended family's seven decades of attendance, we and our children went to school every day with the offspring of intellectual royalty such as Bruno Bettelheim, Daniel Boorstin, Emily Buss, Joseph Cropsey, Richard Epstein, Gene Fama, John Hope Franklin, Nicholas Katzenbach, Heinz Kohut, Edward Levi, Richard Lewontin, Richard Posner, Janet Rowley, Cass Sunstein, and George Stigler. Also sitting beside us humble Schulmans, Diamonds, and Biedermans were the offspring of dozens of prominent black businessmen, doctors, and professors, of Joe Louis, of great black lawyers like Earl Dickerson (who himself attended Lab in 1907) and Judge Ann Williams, of artists like Ramsey Lewis, Dick Gregory, and Oscar Brown Jr., of the families of Congressman Gus Savage and the Johnsons of *Ebony* magazine, and many others. For decades, the Lab School has been home to people exactly like the Obamas.

Sandra Tsing Loh, too, had her spiritual antecedents among my parents' generation. Some of them moved to the suburbs "so that our kids won't grow up to be racists," as one father told my parents at a dinner party in the 1960s. Others sent their kids to the public Hyde Park High School, then a 97 percent non-diverse school, where they were, as whites, isolated, frightened, and forced to keep strictly to themselves. My friends who underwent this demonstration of parental conscience tell me that their parents were oblivious to their real—and unnecessary—suffering.

One senses that Senator Obama has had to make many compromises with his better self to get to wherever it is he is today. As Dreiser knew, that's not an uncommon Chicago story. But to the Obamas' credit, these are compromises that they have spared their daughters. Sending his children to a private school that most of those whose votes he needs will never be able to afford may be the finest thing Barack Obama has ever done. ♦

The Bonfire of the Hypocrisies

The nomination that launched a thousand attacks.

BY TOD LINDBERG

Historians looking back on these tumultuous times will no doubt argue over the precise date on which the Age of Palin began. Her speech at the Republican National Convention on September 3 certainly catapulted her to national renown. But there is a good case to be made for her introductory appearance in Dayton, Ohio, five days before.

It's all there: You have the same poise and panache Palin exhibited at the convention. You have the self-assurance of a champion high-school athlete who went on to bigger and better things (unlike in the gloomy Democratic, Bruce Springsteen version of life, in which it's all downhill after your Glory Days). There's the ability to deliver a barb with a smile. And above all, that day inaugurated arguably the most incoherent and blubbering partisan response to a candidate in the history of American politics—against which the charms of the candidate stood out even more clearly.

Let's get this straight: Your party has just nominated for president a fellow who has been elected exactly once to the United States Senate, in an uncompetitive race, following a garden-variety stint in a state legislature. And your response to the GOP nominee's choice for *vice president*—someone who has been elected once as governor following a stint as a small town mayor—is to decry the lack of experience? Nobody ever said Barack Obama was unqualified for the *No. 2* spot on the ticket.

Had Hillary Clinton won the nomination and selected Obama as her running mate—which, being a savvy politician, she would certainly have done, in order to fire up his *18 million* primary supporters—Obama would have been perfectly positioned. Either he would be preparing himself as vice president for his run for the Oval Office eight years hence. Or he would be experienced and tested in a national campaign that he would never be held responsible for losing, with a fundraising base beyond the imagination of Croesus. Instead, it's McCain-Palin with the wind at their backs, and Palin who is being prepared as the outstanding future prospect for her party.

Now, you might think it hypocritical to criticize the inexperience of a vice presidential nominee who has

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similar experience to your presidential nominee, but that's just a failure of the imagination. Indeed, *hypocrisy* was the strange charge Democrats decided to make against McCain and Palin: Having run against Obama all summer for his lack of experience and accomplishment, how dare John McCain pick as his running mate someone with (ahem) experience comparable to that of the Democratic candidate for president McCain had been criticizing?

Well, maybe because it is not a sign of the strength of a candidate at the top of a ticket to need the experience of Joe Biden (or Dick Cheney) in order to allay concerns that he's not quite up to some aspects of the job. And, contrariwise, it is a sign of strength at the top when the nominee can look to the future and make a priority of party-building. Does anybody think that if Obama loses, he will have left his party in a stronger position by advancing the prospects of Joe Biden? Fortunately for Democrats, at least they've got Hillary in the wings.

But these weren't the only hypocrisies in the air. Remember reading the discussions of Vice President Al Gore's parenting skills in all the papers the day after his teenage son got busted for dope at high school? No? That would be because Gore called around to all the papers (including the *Washington Times*, where I was editorial page editor at the time) and asked us not to publish it, kids being kids and being owed some privacy. The newspapers didn't. That was then: Given a preposterous Internet rumor that Sarah Palin was never pregnant with her four-month-old baby but faked it to cover up for her daughter, Bristol was fair game. This was a judgment shared among Democrats and, coincidentally, the media (the same ones who were also all over the John Edwards love-child story, remember?).

And so Democrats started pointing at the stunning "hypocrisy" of McCain putting Palin on the ticket in spite of her pregnant daughter. Shouldn't all the GOP talk about family values and abstinence education have disqualified Palin? Because, after all, Bristol is getting married and keeping the baby, and if that isn't a sure disqualification for someone's mother for the vice presidency, what is?

Plus, Sarah Palin, we've been informed endlessly, is a hypocrite with a capital H. In all the obvious ways, such as being opposed to women's rights while still having a career. Democrats have been at the forefront of cheering women on to break supposed glass ceilings, but only the right kind of women, which you can be pretty sure a Republican woman isn't.

Then there's all the pro-life business: It just took one columnist in *Salon* to expose the hypocrisy there: Palin had her baby tested for Down syndrome, and then—had the baby! If

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she were really pro-life, there wouldn't have been any reason to have the test. As Rahul K. Parikh, M.D., explained:

> We could ask, given that Palin had no doubts about seeing her pregnancy through, why she bothered to take a genetic test. Why not, as you might expect a woman in her position and with her outspoken beliefs to do, decline any testing or counseling? Of course, it seems very reasonable to want to know about the health of your baby and to have time to prepare (emotionally and otherwise) for a baby that may have a genetic disorder. But that doesn't negate the fact that by having a blood test, Palin was given a choice about what to do. . . . Her supporters say that Trig signals that she practices what she preaches. Her decision to make her own choice but not grant it to others is a sign of her hypocrisy.

So let's see if the pro-lifers can get this straight for a change: If you are going to have the baby anyway, you are not entitled to information about its health (even though the desire for such information is "very reasonable"), because some people who are not pro-life use such information as a basis for deciding whether to terminate their pregnancies. Got it?

But the most stunning hypocrisy of all, from the point of view of most Democrats and, coincidentally, the media again, was that McCain had promised a vice presidential nominee qualified for the job and then undertook such a haphazard, last-minute, incompetent vetting process that he found out all the things that Democrats and the media are so exercised about. And he went ahead with Sarah Palin anyway!

And just look at the bitter fruit McCain has reaped for all his "hypocrisies": Palin has helped propel him ahead of Obama in national polls for the first time. Fifty-two percent of respondents in a Pew survey think she is ready to be *president* now. If people could vote only for vice president, they favor her over Biden 53-44 in a CNN poll. And the unknown governor of two weeks before is now the most popular Republican politician in the country. ♦

Obama's Foreign Policy Mentor

Where John McCain goes, Barack eventually follows. BY MATTHEW CONTINETTI

He has 300 foreign policy advisers and the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations committee is his vice presidential nominee. And yet Barack Obama's foreign policy is still all twists and turns, forever adapting to every change in the political circumstances.

Terrorist surveillance? Obama was against this year's revision to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, until he voted for it.

Negotiations with rogue dictators? In 2007 Obama pledged to meet with Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his friends "without precondition." But that was *so* last year. These days, Obama hedges. He says "preparations" will take place before any summits, and that those summits will occur only if he thinks they will further American national security interests.

The surge? Obama was a vocal opponent. He predicted that sending reinforcements to Iraq and changing strategy would not just fail but indeed make things worse. Didn't happen, of course. And now the other day Obama said the surge has succeeded beyond "our wildest expectations." His expectations, certainly.

On issue after issue, Obama's small army of wonks has not been able to keep him from stumbling. His instinct, of course, is to stake out positions on the left. But reality intrudes. It forces Obama to adjust. A talented writer, he is keenly aware of subtle distinctions in word choice and emphasis, and the shifts in position are sometimes difficult to detect. But they are there nonetheless. And so often Obama follows in the footsteps of his true foreign policy mentor: John McCain.

On issue after issue, Obama's small army of wonks has not been able to keep him from stumbling. His instinct, of course, is to stake out positions on the left. But reality intrudes.

As the story goes, shortly after coming to Washington, Obama sought out McCain to tell him that he was a role model. The two were friends until a dispute over an ethics bill soured the relationship. But Obama still took, and continues to take, foreign policy cues from McCain. On many issues there is little difference between the two candidates. They both oppose torture and want to shut down the terrorist prison at Guantánamo Bay. They both support expanding the Army and Marine Corps. They both support a cap-and-trade scheme to limit carbon emissions. Both promise to reach the quixotic goal of "energy independence." Both want to send more troops to Afghanistan, recognize the sovereignty of Kosovo, and support NATO expansion. Both repeatedly say that America is an exceptional country. Neither man forswears the use of force to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. And both say unilateral military action is always an option.

Where there is divergence, it doesn't last long. In December 2006 the Senate debated a civilian nuclear

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cooperation agreement between the United States and India. That agreement—the product of long, intense negotiations between the Bush administration and the Indian government—will cement a new strategic alliance between our two countries. Yet Obama voted for a series of so-called "killer" amendments that would have made the agreement dead on arrival. His side lost. A bipartisan group of senators, including Biden and McCain, were able to defeat the amendments Obama supported. And once those amendments had been defeated, something curious happened. Obama completely changed his tune. He became a vocal supporter of the deal (which must be approved by Congress once more before taking effect).

When Russia invaded Georgia last month, Obama released a statement condemning the "outbreak of violence" and urging both sides to show "restraint." A sorry response. An "outbreak" suggests there was no agency behind the war. That it simply sprung into being. Not so. Russia invaded. Russia was responsible. And it was Russia, not the defeated Georgians, which needed—and still needs—to show "restraint."

McCain's response could not have been more different from Obama's. He did not equivocate. He called Russia what it is—the aggressor in an unjustified war. And he was unafraid to express solidarity with a fellow democracy, saying, "We are all Georgians." For this he was called a reckless warmonger by many on both the left and the right. Obama's chief foreign policy adviser—the secretary general of the 300—actually suggested McCain had made the situation worse by condemning it.

But what did Obama do? As time passed, he began to sound more like . . . McCain. Every so often he would emerge from his vacation digs in Hawaii and ratchet up the rhetoric. In a later statement, Obama said there was no justification for Russia's actions. He called on Russia to end the violence immediately. He supported economic aid to Georgia to help reconstruct that battered country. On Georgia, the differences between the two candidates grew smaller and smaller. And soon only one difference remained. McCain had been there first.

Then there is Iraq. During the Democratic primaries, I wrote that, if elected, Obama would stick to his artificial timeline for withdrawal from Iraq no matter what ("They Really Do Plan to Surrender" in the April 21, 2008, Weekly Standard). I'm not so sure anymore. These days Obama's goal—withdrawing combat troops from Iraq within 16 months of taking office—seems more a hope than a plan. In July, Obama told *Newsweek* his withdrawal would be "entirely conditions based," meaning the redeployments could slow down, or end, if violence in Iraq took a turn for the worse. A conditions-based withdrawal is exactly what General Petraeus and McCain support.

Meanwhile, Obama says the United States needs to be as "careful" leaving Iraq as we were "careless" going in. Another word for "careful" is "slow." And Obama calls for a "rapid reaction force" that would be used to control violence and "prevent the conflict in Iraq from becoming a wider war." Except Obama has not said how large his "rapid reaction force" will be or where it will be deployed. Thousands of troops? Tens of thousands? In Iraq? Kuwait? Timbuktu?

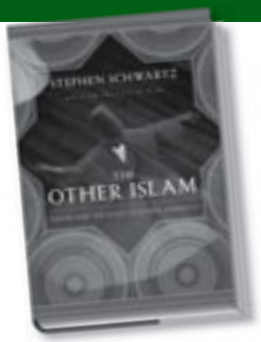
Whatever the case, it looks like Obama now intends for there to be a substantial American troop presence in Iraq for some time to come. Faced with the prospect of governing, he has shunted aside the rhetoric and policies that so titillated the left during the Democratic primary. He still may occasionally feint in that direction. But his overall course is steadily toward the center. Toward an internationalist foreign policy well within the tradition of recent presidents. Toward a substantial American engagement with the world and the maintenance of American primacy. Toward McCain. ♦

Center for Islamic Pluralism (CIP) PRESENTS

Radical Islam and Its Muslim Critics

A Day of Events in Washington, DC

Tuesday, September 23, 2008



Admission is free.

The Other Islam and ***In the Land of Invisible Women*** will be available for purchase and signing at both events.

10 AM - 11:30 AM: Stephen Schwartz on "The Other Euro-Islam: Turkish and Balkan Sufism," launching his new book, ***The Other Islam: Sufism and the Road to Global Harmony*** (Doubleday), hosted by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Southeast Europe Project, 6th Floor Boardroom, Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20004. Tel. 202/691-4000.

3 PM - 5 PM: Schwartz on ***The Other Islam,*** Dr. Qanta Ahmed on her new book on Saudi Arabia, ***In the Land of Invisible Women*** (Sourcebooks), Imaad Malik on ***Black America, Prisons, and Radical Islam*** (CIP), at the National Press Club, 13th Floor, Edward R. Murrow Room, 529 14th St. NW, Washington, DC 20045. Tel. 202/662-7957.

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The Woodward Way of War

It's not who wins, it's how you make the decisions.

BY PETER WEHNER

Bob Woodward has written his fourth book in six years on the Bush presidency. They have ranged from fairly glowing (*Bush at War*) to excoriating (*State of Denial*). The latest, *The War Within: A Secret White House History 2006-2008*, while less harsh on Bush than *State of Denial*, is still plenty critical.

Based on interviews with more than 150 people, including nearly three hours of interviews with the president himself, the book features details from key meetings and secret memoranda, the sometimes candid and often self-flattering thoughts of many of the key actors in the Iraq war, and describes the heated debates and dissents within the administration during the period when President Bush embraced a new strategy in Iraq, "the surge."

The picture Woodward paints isn't pretty, and his judgment is harsh. In his epilogue, for example, Woodward writes that too often Bush "failed to lead" and states, "The president rarely was the voice of realism on the Iraq War." In his promotional interviews, Woodward is at least as critical of Bush as he is in his book, portraying him as detached and out of touch, his administration as dysfunctional, and his presidency as essentially a failure.

Students of the Iraq war will find this book well worth reading, but for reasons Woodward probably didn't intend. *The War Within* reveals something important about key figures in the Washington drama of the past two years.

Peter Wehner, former deputy assistant to President Bush, is a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

BOB WOODWARD: In making his judgment about the president during this period, Woodward has focused almost exclusively on the process rather than the outcome of Bush's decision. The author himself admits that the book is "really about a second front in Washington, where the military, the State Department, intelligence people and the White House could not reach agreement."

In an hour-long interview with Larry King, Woodward uttered only a single (and somewhat peculiar) sentence on the subject of the surge and its success:

> [Bush] made a decision that has led us to a much better condition, and if you are of the Karl Rove view of politics and life in America, which is everything gets measured by outcomes, you could look at this and say it's a positive.

I'm not sure what the Karl Rove reference means. I think it would strike millions of Americans, including those who disagree with Rove politically, as right and appropriate to measure decisions by their outcome. We do that when it comes to judging presidents, generals, doctors, coaches, and almost everyone else in life. It is, for most of us, the acid test of a leader.

That appears not to be the case for Woodward. He is overwhelmingly, almost obsessively, concerned about process. Who was driving it (Bush or his national security adviser, Stephen Hadley)? Which meetings did or did not the president attend? Did the "right" amount of communication take place between the civilian leadership and the military?

Process matters and it can influence outcomes, but results matter much more. One cannot help feeling that Woodward would have been more favorably disposed toward the president if a tidy, consensus-driven, bipartisan process had led to a bad outcome (hasty withdrawal from Iraq) rather than a messy process and an unpopular decision leading to a good outcome (the quelling of violence in Iraq).

On the matter of the surge, Woodward downplays its importance. He argues that the enormous drop in violence in Iraq is owed mainly to other factors (the Sunni uprising against Al Qaeda in Iraq and the ceasefire with Moktada al-Sadr), and even to luck (a top-secret operation targeting terrorist leaders came online, he claims, at the same time the surge was being executed).

What Woodward misses, I think, is that the surge reinforced every good thing that has happened in Iraq. All the other actors—the Sunnis in Anbar, Al Qaeda in Iraq, Sadr and his minions, the government in Baghdad, Iraq's neighbors—had to factor the staying power and reinforcment of the U.S.-led coalition into their calculations. It enabled everything else to take place. Yet you would never figure that out reading *The War Within*.

PRESIDENT BUSH: One comes away from Woodward's account reminded of the phalanx of opposition the president faced in pushing for the surge—from his secretaries of defense and state, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq (General George W. Casey Jr.), the commander of U.S. Central Command (John P. Abizaid), the Iraq Study Group, and almost the entire political and foreign policy establishment.

Bush was close to alone in his advocacy of the surge, which testifies both to his strategic insight and to his political courage. It's revealing that NBC host Matt Lauer, in interviewing the author, took exception to Woodward's claim that Bush failed to lead. "Some advisers are saying don't go with the surge. Military people are saying two brigades, not five. And [Bush] said,

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'No, I'm going to go all in on this. I'm doubling down' . . . that is leadership, like it or not, isn't it?"

Woodward responded, "Well, of course, but this is a very complicated process." And then he spent the rest of his answer talking about . . . process.

There is no question that changes in our Iraq strategy should have been made much sooner than they were; if anything, the president can be faulted for being *too* deferential to the top military brass and to his cabinet prior to the surge. That's why some of us are delighted Bush eventually paid such close attention to outside voices like retired General Jack Keane, a strong proponent of the surge.

By late 2006, the president came to embrace a fundamentally different counter-insurgency strategy in Iraq. With his popularity low and with only a handful of people standing at his side, he made what was manifestly the right decision. Bush's decision has, by any objective measure, been vindicated. And that, more than anything else, is the significance of the period Woodward covers.

The Military Brass: Woodward's book is not quite the "untold" story of the surge its publishers claim. In fact, it has already been told by others, including Michael Gordon at the *New York Times*, Peter Feaver in *Commentary*, and Fred Barnes in these pages. Thanks to its much greater length and detail, *The War Within* is able to drive home with almost jackhammer-like repetition the degree of opposition the president faced from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as from Generals Abizaid and Casey.

"To win, we have to draw down," Casey told the president in June 2006. In a conversation later that year, Abizaid told the president he was against the surge, arguing that U.S. forces needed to get out of Iraq in order to win. According to Woodward, the Joint Chiefs had "all but dismissed the surge option" and in a series of meetings in November 2006, their "frustrations burst into the open." So intense was their opposition that Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, recommended that Bush sit down with them, allowing them to hear the pro-surge case in person. In that meeting, held in December, General Peter Schoomaker, the Army chief of staff, told the president, "I don't think that you have the time to surge and generate enough forces for this thing to continue to go." He and others were more concerned about waging a hypothetical future war than about winning the ongoing one in Iraq.

Bob Woodward

ASSOCIATED PRESS / ELISE AMENDOLA

Virtually the entire top Pentagon brass, as well as Bush's key generals, were opposed to the surge. They were wrong on almost every count. Yet Woodward does nothing to highlight this overwhelmingly important fact.

Beyond that, Woodward's book captures the bitterness of the Joint Chiefs at having their advice overridden. General Casey found it "demeaning" to have to answer a series of 50 probing (and necessary) questions posed by Hadley, the national security adviser. When the president reminded Casey and others, via videoconference, that "we're not playing for a tie," we learn that Casey considered it an "affront to his dignity," a statement "just short of an outright provocation."

It got so bad that Admiral Michael Mullen, who also opposed the surge and replaced Peter Pace as chairman of the Joint Chiefs, attempted to keep General Keane from traveling to Iraq, because Keane allowed for a line of communication straight from Bush to General David Petraeus. "You've diminished the office of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs," Mullen reportedly told Keane. (The White House interceded and saw to it that Keane could travel to Iraq.)

One comes away from Woodward's book with an even greater respect for Petraeus, who, along with General Raymond Odierno, resisted enormous pressure from those higher up in the chain of command and executed the surge with brilliant efficiency.

Woodward's book reports all of these episodes, many vividly. He allows the key actors to have their say. And yet he seems unable to give the president the credit he deserves. (Woodward even asserts that the surge strategy was "crippled" by dissension within the administration, when that is clearly not so.)

What President Bush did in advocating the surge was an extraordinary act of presidential leadership, with few precedents in American history. It doesn't erase the many mistakes and missteps that were made along the way. It doesn't mean the process of decision making was tidy. The human and financial cost of the war has been higher than it should have been. But to have put us in position to redeem a war that was widely considered to be lost is an impressive and honorable achievement. History will deem it such, even if Bob Woodward won't. ♦

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The Passion of Dick Cheney

Fishing the Snake River with the vice president

By Matt Labash

I fish because I love to . . . because, in a world where most men seem to spend their lives doing things they hate, my fishing is at once an endless source of delight and an act of small rebellion; because trout do not lie or cheat and cannot be bought or bribed or impressed by power, but respond only to quietude and humility and endless patience . . . because only in the woods can one find solitude without loneliness; because bourbon out of an old tin cup tastes better out there; because maybe someday I will catch a mermaid; and, finally, not because I regard fishing as being so terribly important but because I suspect that so many of the other concerns of men are equally unimportant—and not nearly so much fun.

—Robert Traver, *Anatomy of a Fisherman* (1964)

Jackson, Wyoming

At the risk of being publicly ridiculed, quarantined, or stoned, I'll just say it straightaway: I really like Dick Cheney. Don't get me wrong, I feel sick about it.

Not because I've ever held anything against the guy personally. In fact, many of the parts of Cheney's public persona that repel others, I rather enjoy. I've always liked his ruthless non-sentimentality in an age of lip-biters and tear-squirters. I like that you're never apt to hear him invoke "the children" as a reason for peddling some unrelated initiative.

Matt Labash is a senior writer at The Weekly Standard.

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With the Tetons as a backdrop, Cheney fishes on the Snake River in Wyoming.

WHITE HOUSE PHOTO BY DAVID BOHRER

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("I'm not a baby kisser," he once said on the campaign trail.) I like that he doesn't seem to care about being liked, which is lucky for him, since his approval rating hovers at 18 percent. But let's just say I haven't cared for many of his signature projects as vice president. It is not for nothing that the wags suggest that Cheney keeps George W. Bush one heartbeat away from the presidency.

But Cheney is also known as a fisherman, and I am a fishing slut with little or no moral center.

Last September, I attended a book party on the roof of the Hay-Adams Hotel in Washington, D.C., which Cheney was to attend. I showed up early and, seeing there were two open bars, availed myself of both. By the time Cheney arrived, I had a bellyful of truth serum.

I made a beeline for him, squared up, looked him in the eye, and said, "I understand you're an avid fly-fisherman."

"Yes," he replied.

"So am I," I responded.

From there, we were off. We might've talked five minutes or we might've talked five hours. It's hard to recall now. Fishing-related happenings tend to occur outside of time. Herbert Hoover, a noted fly-fisherman, was fond of quoting an Assyrian proverb that went, "The gods do not subtract from the allotted span of men's lives the hours spent fishing." I believe the same is true of talking about fishing.

Cheney, a surprisingly attentive listener, asked as much as he answered. He was fascinated by an experiment I'd been conducting for some time: catching catfish on a fly. This isn't typically done, since catfish most often reject artificials. Many fly-fishermen recoil at such an ambition, since telling trout purists you're chasing lowly catfish with a fly rod is tantamount to telling Heidi Klum that what you're really attracted to is bearded women with no teeth. But Cheney evidenced genuine curiosity. Perhaps he sensed a kindred spirit. Remaking the Middle East as a Western democracy vs. chasing catfish on a fly—each of us is addicted to some pet implausibility.

He asked where I fish, and, when I gave generalities, he pressed for specifics. So much so that I was worried I might show up the next day to find the vice president taking largemouth in my favorite spot. So I lied slightly about the locales. You can't be too careful about such things.

As we talked, my wife sidled up to me, elbowing my ribs for an introduction. I told Cheney this was my fishing widow. He said hello to her and that he had one, too. We immediately resumed the fish-talk and ignored her. I was in good standing and hoping for an invite to fish his home river, the majestic Snake in Wyoming—an invitation I was convinced was forthcoming, but which never materialized after Cheney was interrupted and pulled away.

After our conversation, second thoughts started nagging. Maybe Cheney was misunderstood. Maybe he wasn't BeelzeDick or Darth Vader, as his critics would have it.

GARY LOCKE

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How could someone who spends so much time seeking out beautiful creatures in beautiful places not have the sensitivity of a naturalist and the soul of a poet? (As I said, there were two open bars.)

A year after the book party, with time running out on the Bush administration, I took another crack at Cheney and proposed to his people that I go fishing with him on his preferred home water near his Wyoming residence, which turns out to be the South Fork of the Snake River. Though Cheney grants few interviews, his people were uncharacteristically agreeable. Perhaps it's because after eight years, they were just weary of saying "no." Perhaps it's because of the heartfelt piscatorial nature of the request.

While fishing doesn't occupy Cheney's every waking moment—according to his estimates, he only spends about 10-12 days a year on the water because of his job—it still takes up plenty of space in his consciousness. This I learn from visiting the library at his official residence at the Naval Observatory.

The shelves of his library contain the art books, histories, literature, and presidential and vice presidential material (including the complete works of Dan Quayle) that one would expect. But many of these are shelved high and out-of-reach. Most accessible, on the shelves above the television, is a fly-fishing library within a library, books on every subject from entomology to minor tactics of the chalk stream to practical dry-fly fishing.

All the greats are represented: Lee Wulff, Izaak Walton, G.E.M. Skues, Lefty Kreh, Roderick Haig-Brown, and the not-so-greats as well. There are lush, leather and gilt-edged collectibles with gorgeous frontispieces of men in tweeds casting bamboo rods on placid streams, and dog-eared paperbacks intended not for decoration, but to acquire hardcore fishing knowledge.

When I pull down an old volume of Ernest Schwiebert's classic *Trout*, I find discarded Hershey's mini-candy-bar wrappers behind where the books sit, perhaps from surreptitious snacking during a less health-conscious time in the now-trim Cheney's life (friends say he's lost around 25 pounds in the last year). In all, there are 37 fishing books on the shelves, and 43 more in stacks. This doesn't include whatever books he has in Wyoming or at his weekend place on Maryland's Eastern Shore. You can say many things about Dick Cheney that have no chance of leaving a mark. But say he fishes thoughtlessly, and one might wound him irreparably.

I learn from current and former aides just how obsessed the man whose Secret Service handle is "Angler" actually is. One directs me to a passage in Bob Woodward's *Commanders*, which tells how when Cheney was being confirmed for secretary of defense, he told his vetters in the first Bush administration that they should be aware of some "youthful indiscretions." He wasn't just referring to two drunk-driving arrests from over 25 years prior, but also the time he'd been fined for fishing out of season. Not a catch-and-release man back then (he tells me he hasn't killed a fish on purpose in roughly 15 years), "The $25 fine was not the worst part," he said. "They took my f—ing fish."

Cheney is a superb fisherman. He is a fierce caster. He has pinpoint precision with his fly, throwing sliders under branches, lopping flies over tree limbs, dropping his hopper just off the bank's edge, making it look extra attractive to a trout.

Another aide tells me that early on, those in the administration wishing to cut through the clutter of Cheney's daily barrage of mail would take to sticking flies in the envelopes knowing his staff would make sure he received them. I am told how he fishes in rain and snow, and how once his mind is set on fishing, he will not be deterred, even by bloodletting.

Former aide Brian McCormack, now special assistant to the president for strategic initiatives and external affairs, says several years ago Cheney took him fishing on a drift boat on the Snake River. Relatively new to the sport at the time, McCormack, trying to adjust his cast on a windy day, ended up hooking the vice president. "The hook did not set," says McCormack. "But it smacked him on the back of the neck. I don't know how exactly one describes a vice presidential yelp. He let out a 'yoooooowwww.' The trees came alive with Secret Service. He leaned forward with a grimace, like he got stung by an enormous bee. I'm in the back of the boat saying, 'What the hell did I just do?' He turned around, and looked at me. I said, 'Sir, I am reeeaallly sorry.' He said, 'Don't worry. I've gotten it in the ear before.' And he just went on fishing."

According to those who fish with him, Cheney is also quite competitive on the river. When I ask his daughter Liz about this, she downplays it, speaking of his grandfatherly attributes: his teaching members of the family to fish so they can enjoy "the magnificent beauty of the places you get to do it," showing the grandchildren how to

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cast, rig their lines and remove their hooks. "I can't imagine a better, more patient guide or teacher."

His friends take an earthier view. "Is he competitive?" laughs Dick Scarlett, one of Cheney's closest friends and chairman of Wells Fargo, Wyoming. "Oh, I think so." Scarlett heads up a group of eight friends, including Cheney, who for over a decade have annually put in two days on the Bighorn River in Montana, before coming back to Jackson for a few more and then a two-day float down the South Fork, while camping overnight in the canyon.

The group calls itself "The Great Release," though Jay Kemmerer, a member and owner of the Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, originally pushed for "The Rainbow Coalition" (after rainbow trout, of course). The camp, nicknamed the South Fork Hilton, is hardly roughing it. On some of the most productive dry-fly trout water in the west, the camp contains wall-tents, cots, fresh linens and towels. There is wine and whisky (Cheney is a Johnny Walker Red man, though these days he rarely drinks more than a glass of wine). The Great Release even imports its own personal chef.

He has gotten out with the president in Crawford. 'We fish for bass on his pond down there,' Cheney says with the air of a man itching for faster, more interesting water. Cheney stays on the fly rod, while Bush chucks 'bubba bait,' not so masterfully suppressing a fly-fisherman's elitism.

Everyone calls the vice president "Dick"—even the guides. Current events are often discussed, though there are no prosecutorial arguments, as his friends reason Cheney gets roughed up enough in the outside world. And there is lots of entertainment. In fact, there is an entertainment committee. While what goes on at the South Fork Hilton is supposedly cloaked under a code of silence, a few details are forthcoming.

There are skits, Kemmerer tells me, often with elaborate props. "We clearly tell the Secret Service what we're doing," says Kemmerer, "because some of it—well, they might shoot us." Cheney laughs readily as an observer at this campfire Friar's Roast/Gridiron Dinner and is open to the same ribbing as everybody else. Kemmerer says there have been hanging chads strewn about the grounds, and that he personally has played John Kerry and John Edwards.

Rich Santore, an orthopedic surgeon and chief of staff at Sharp Memorial Hospital in San Diego, became a member of the group after replacing Scarlett's hips. As one of the unofficial heads of the entertainment committee, he takes it even further. A couple of years ago, he had to buy a whole bunch of dresses, bras, panties, and such for skit-time at the South Fork Hilton. At the checkout line, after asking the clerk what dress size would be right for him, he felt compelled to tell her "It's not what you think." ("That's what they all say," said the clerk.) When I ask who on earth was being portrayed, Santore says he'd better not disclose. "Janet Reno?" I ask him, figuring she has even odds if drag is involved. "Well," he says reluctantly, "that was one."

But these are all sideshows to the competitive main event: the daily Big Fish contest. Members ante up 10 bucks a day, and the biggest fish takes the pot (Cheney used to pay by check, but since Scarlett kept one as a souvenir, refusing to cash it, Cheney will now only pay in cash). According to the estimates I gather from friends and guides, Cheney is the pot-winner anywhere from one quarter to one-half of the time. Scarlett, who is equally competitive, and who's been fly-fishing since he was a small child, does not mince praise for the man who is often his boatmate.

"Dick Cheney is an excellent fisherman," he says. "He throws a mean dry fly. He goes in where the big fish are in the most difficult places. He can place a fly from 40-50 feet out, into shrubbery, in between bushes where the big fish lay. Where most people are fishing two or three feet away from the bushes so they don't hook up, Dick can place a fly on a saucer at 40 feet. He is very, very good."

"The guides will tell you he's one of the best fishermen they guide on the river," Scarlett continues, and indeed, several do. "Other than myself," Scarlett hastens to add, ever the competitor.

While his friends say Cheney isn't a trash-talker like some, they concur that he takes the Big Fish contest very seriously. Cheney later admits to me that, one year, "I had a picture taken of a brown trout I caught up here, blown up, life-size, and sent it to [Kemmerer], as a reminder of who caught the big fish that year."

Sensing my work is cut out for me, I head out west a day early to fish solo with a guide and acclimate myself to the South Fork, presumably lessening the vice president's chances of outfishing me. I drive about an hour outside of Jackson, through the switchbacks of the Targhee National Forest, to Irwin, Idaho. There I will

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Cheney fishes from his perch in the front of the boat.

THE WEEKLY STANDARD / MATT LABASH

launch with the same outfit that we will be using the following day (and which Cheney has been using for years), the pristine Lodge at Palisades Creek.

All knotty pine and rustic cabins (decades ago, the laundry building used to be a house of prostitution servicing the itinerant workers who helped build nearby Palisades Dam), gourmet meals and single malts are served up in their Liar's Den restaurant, and there's a full-service fly shop on the grounds.

My guide for the day is Jaason Pruett, a 34-year-old former college hoops player, who is not some delicate Orvis-catalog-issue trout teapot, but a take-no-prisoners river rat. The bed of his pickup truck is littered with Twisted Tea and Budweiser empties. His dashboard is carpeted and stuck with many of his sentimental-favorite flies. He wears a denim bucket hat from a car dealership, an "Abercrabby and Fish" T-shirt, a red swimsuit, and green Crocs for wet-wading.

The South Fork of the Snake is a tailwater that runs fast and cold out of the Palisades Reservoir. The guides here double as rowers for the ClackaCraft drift boats which, in addition to the middle bench for the oarsman, have swivel chairs for two fishermen in the bow and stern, along with leg brackets so you can stand and cast without falling into the drink, as the river is often rough. (Pruett says he's saved drowning people multiple times, and that less adept civilian rowers see the river eating about four boats a season.)

We do a 10-mile float through what is truly God's country. It is wallpapered with wildflowers and golden willows, mountain maples and cottonwood forests, populated by bobcats, moose and black bears. Red-tail hawks and bald eagles patrol the skies overhead.

More important, however, the river is thick with trout—browns and cutthroats, rainbows and hybrid cutbows—about 7,000 fish per mile. These aren't the SNIT's (standard 9-inch trout) I'm accustomed to back east, either. There, the relative scarcity of good water means that our overpressured streams hold fish that are bombed with so many flies they ought to be issued hardhats. On the South Fork of the Snake, trout are 15-17 inches on average, with 20-inchers not out of the question. They feed aggressively, and they are slutty for dries (flies that sit atop the water, which make fish rise so you can see the take). It makes perfect sense that this is one of Cheney's favorite runs.

As Pruett rows and sets me up on fish, he speaks of the hazards of being a guide: of the yuppies who spend all this money to come out and avail themselves of his services,

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Cheney with cutthroat trout and guide Pat Kelly

WHITE HOUSE PHOTO BY DAVID BOHRER

but who then spend all afternoon telling him how to catch fish in his own backyard. Sometimes, he has to teach them a lesson, such as the know-it-all "who thought he was the cat's meow. So I cut the hook off his fly, and he didn't know it. After about the sixth fish in a row that he missed, I said, 'Man, I thought you were good—why aren't you getting these fish?' He's like, 'Jaason, what am I doing wrong?' I said, 'Do you wanna listen to me? Let me change your fly out.' He listened."

Pruett and his guides have no such problems with Cheney. There are inconveniences, to be sure, such as having to sweep his truck and boat clean of any mysterious herbal substances and leave behind his gun, which he otherwise likes to pack on the river—just in case—in order to pass muster with the Secret Service. But Pruett says the guides regard Cheney as a gentleman without pretense, who's a pleasure to row.

Cheney isn't some fussy streamside entomologist, either, sifting water with a cheesecloth to see if he can match the hatch. But he knows his stuff, and when he doesn't know something, says Pruett, he is eminently coachable and invariably polite, even if he's not renowned for his smalltalk. He takes both fishing and solitude seriously, and the river is his place to escape. Other drift-boaters will often float by having no idea that they just passed the vice president of the United States. ("We don't have a sign on him," Dick Scarlett tells me).

Pruett says that the sight of Cheney on the river is so unexpected to some that, once, he even saw a young man who worked for Idaho Fish and Game, who was checking fishing licenses, "but in sneaky spots," head out of the brush, walk right up to Cheney, ask to see his license, and still never put together to whom he was talking. "Clueless," says Pruett.

Pruett is not just a guide, it turns out. He is a stalker of fish. If trout had access to the courts, they'd hit him with a restraining order. He knows their names and unlisted addresses, and he constantly says things, like, "We're gonna get out of the boat here, I have to check on this fish." He puts me onto many. I catch a smattering of cutthroats, browns and rainbows, along with several whitefish (which the locals derisively call "Rocky Mountain bonefish"). But I'm slow on the trigger today and miss many more.

Blessed with x-ray vision, Pruett even has me cast to a pet brown he's been stalking that I can't see, a 24-inch monster laid up against the head of an island. I float a hopper over him, he explodes on it, then books down-current with line screaming off my reel behind him. Trying to slow him, I'm forced to follow on foot as he's too strong to reel. He finally snaps off after nearly finishing my twig-like 4-weight rod. My expletives would curl his gills if he were still around to hear them.

Pruett is generous about the few fish I catch that come off as he's about to net them. "It counts," he assures, "you had control." I tell him he would say that. It's probably in

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the Fishing Guide Rulebook to always give the fisherman the benefit of the doubt. "Of course," he admits. "Is that a 20-inch fish, or 26? That's 26. What's six inches between friends?"

But he tells it straight when I ask him how he thinks I'll do against Cheney. "First of all, he gets the front of the boat," says Pruett, meaning Cheney's fly gets first pass at all the fish. "Second, this is pretty much his backyard. I could candy-coat it, but I'd be lying. He's going to smoke your ass."

Back in Jackson the next morning, I drive to Cheney's house in the golf-course community of Teton Pines. It is not a "ranch," as is often misstated (his neighbors are close enough to hit him with a rock), but rather a tastefully unostentatious place in a zip code where captains of industry often pay for extras like heated driveways so that their car tires never suffer the inconvenience of snowfall.

Cheney is dressed in zip-off cargo pants and a fly-fishing shirt given to him by one of the lodges where he fishes. (It has "Vice President Dick Cheney" stitched above a breast pocket.) I take a backseat with him in a black Suburban. For the next hour plus, his motorcade will retrace the trek I made the day before.

Many had warned me of Cheney's lust for silence on the river. Ken Adelman once wrote, "Despite pleas over the years, [Cheney] adamantly refused to take me fly-fishing in Wyoming. When pressed, he finally explained, 'You talk too much to go fly-fishing.'"

With an unavoidable stretch of conversation before us (though Cheney did bring two books, which worries me until he tells me they are for the ride home), I probably should have gone the responsible-journalist route and grilled Cheney on matters of electoral politics and world affairs. But all either of us really wanted to talk about was fishing. So we did.

It was a lightning round of fishing-talk. Cheney could even have passed as excitable. Though even on excitable, his voice doesn't vary much from the low hum of a room dehumidifier. I ask him if he's worried that our fishing trip will infringe on him getting back in time to watch that night's festivities at the Democratic convention. He smiles an unregretful smile, and says, "It's been my good fortune to go fishing at crucial times in my career."

One of those times was before the vice-presidential debate in 2004, when he and his debate-prepper, Rob Portman, decided, in Cheney's words, "to hell with it," and instead went fishing on the South Fork. "The most important thing you can do before one of those debates, is to be relaxed. I couldn't think of a better way to relax than to just tune it all out and go spend a day on the river." (Cheney also skipped the 1996 Republican convention, because he was, in his own words, "probably fishing.")

Cheney inherited a love of angling from his family. His grandfather "was a nut on going after catfish . . . one of these guys who was a great believer in stinky, smelly bait." He mixed his own, says Cheney: "chicken guts marinated in blood for a week, or something like that." Once, his grandfather took a trip some place and left his bait mix locked in his old Buick. "He took the keys with him, and we couldn't get it out. . . . The whole neighborhood was rank by the time we got through."

Both of his parents were avid "worm fishermen." His dad, he says, "propagated nightcrawlers. He had—probably dangerous as hell, but he did it—a copper rod that was wired to an electric cord, which you could stick into the socket and a rubber hand line. He'd jam it down to the ground, and nightcrawlers would just pop out."

Cheney first fly-fished when he was 16 years old. Just before football season started, he and three friends threw their bedrolls into a 1948 Ford and took off for a week to the Middle Fork of Wyoming's Powder River, which cuts through a deep canyon. He went down to the hardware store, picked out a fiberglass rod and a half-dozen flies, made the steep descent, and set about "catching trout . . . in this deep canyon. I couldn't even get into it today. But it's a beautiful stream."

Years later, as a congressman, he became much more serious about fly-fishing. According to my colleague Stephen F. Hayes's recent biography of Cheney, one day the congressman was interviewing Merritt Benson for a state rep's job in his office. Benson had worked for *Outdoor Life* magazine before taking a Wyoming Department of Fish and Wildlife job. Cheney glanced at his résumé and got down to real vetting.

Cheney: "I bet you know a few fishing holes in this state."

Benson: "Yeah, I do."

Cheney: "Well I never travel anywhere without my pole in the trunk."

The job was Benson's without delay ("He had some special qualifications," Cheney told me). Under the tutelage of Benson, he started fly-fishing with conviction. Benson introduced him to the legendary guide Don Daughenbaugh, a former ranger at both Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. Daughenbaugh used to guide Jimmy Carter, and up until this year, still rowed Cheney when he hit the Bighorn, though Daughenbaugh's now in his 80s.

I ask Cheney if fishing was ever a consideration in selecting his "undisclosed locations."

"No," he says. "But I have my regular schedule. . . . Your undisclosed location could be a secure facility some place,

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GARY LOCKE

or it could be a corn field in South Dakota where you're hunting, or the South Fork of the Snake."

Being the second most powerful person in the free world has its drawbacks, and work does tend to make its way to the river. His people ask me not to reveal security specifics, but I beg off when I'm told there are divers in trailer boats, as they could interfere with our fishing. I ask him if they're there to sweep the river for possible explosives. He's amused by the paranoia. They're rescue swimmers, he tells me, "in case I fall out of the boat."

His friends say that even on the South Fork Hilton trip, Cheney digests intelligence and wakes up before the rest of the camp to make secure calls back to Washington, never telling them of what transpired before he shows up to breakfast. Cheney admits, "I was over here on the South Fork when the Russians invaded Georgia, so I got word on the river that day. I've always got a communicator with me. . . . We actually carry a satellite dish with us so we can pull over and set up on the sandbar. . . . Stuff happens. Especially in August."

Because of his workload, Cheney can't fish nearly as much as he'd like. He has gotten out with the president in Crawford. "We fish for bass on his pond down there. It goes fine," Cheney says with the air of a man itching for faster, more interesting water. Cheney stays on the fly rod, while Bush chucks "bubba bait," as Cheney calls it, not so masterfully suppressing a fly-fisherman's elitism. I ask Cheney who outfishes whom, and he looks slightly insulted. "He catches more fish out of his pond than I do. Because it's *his* pond."

Cheney sticks with a fly rod at all times (he has so many, he's lost count), because "to do it well, you have to concentrate. It's a way, when you get out there on the river, to sort of cleanse your mind of whatever other cares or concerns you've got. It's a place I [can] go and totally relax, set aside whatever issues I'm working on at the time and just focus on fishing."

He speaks wistfully of fishing for sea-run browns in Tierra del Fuego and taking a rickety cargo helicopter, with benches for seats and all the luggage piled in the middle of the floor, to pull salmon out of the remote and untouched Ponoi River in Russia. There, with the sun not setting north of the Arctic Circle, a fisherman can put in a good, clean 16-hour day.

But it's steelheading in British Columbia that is his absolute favorite. He likes the challenge—you have to

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work, and you can go all day without a strike. "It's basically a sea-run rainbow trout," Cheney says. "I have a lot of respect for the fish, the acrobatics—a 10- or 12-pound steelhead tailwalking down the water, taking out all your line. Catch them, and you're a serious fisherman." He used to fish the Babine River for a week every year with a group of friends who live in the northwest. The place they go is reachable only by air. "They've got about 25 or 30 miles of the river all to themselves," he says. He's been unable to join them for years, but "They're still saving my slot," he says, chomping at the bit.

Our convoy reaches the South Fork, where we put in next to what feels like a wind tunnel right beneath Palisades Dam. Cheney changes into his chest waders, hauls all of his own gear and rigs his own rods, one of which is a fine Sage 6-weight, with an ivory inlaid trout on its reel seat. His Abel reel, too, is a thing of art, decorated with the colored spots of a brown trout.

"What do you fish?" he asks, curiously.

I tend to go with the ghetto set-up: dull black, retro-looking $20 Pflueger Medalist reels—turned backwards because I'm too lazy to switch them from right-hand to left-hand retrieve—and my beat-up L.L. Bean 6-weight, which has plumber's tape secured around a hairline crack under one ferrule. "I'm low-tech," I tell him, by which I mean I'm cheap—though the fish don't seem to know the difference.

Cheney's fly rubber-banded out of the water and came within inches of my face, nearly turning me into the fly-fishing equivalent of Harry Whittington, his less fortunate hunting partner.

He winces when I pull my tape recorder out of my chest-wader pouch. "I don't want to be on all day," he says. And he suspiciously eyes my beyond-raggedy, lucky fishing cap, which I have on backwards. "They ever offer to buy you a new hat, Matt?" Staying on the theme of my employers, he adds, "You know the only reason I agreed to this? I wanted to see what kind of reporter had the cojones to convince his editors to pay for him to come fish the South Fork."

Our guide, Pat Kelly, shoves us off into the chop, and despite all the forewarnings of sacrosanct Cheney silence on the river, he keeps up a steady patter over the next eight hours. He inquires about my kids and asks Kelly about his offseason employment. He tells me what he likes to read (*Fly Fisherman*, *Gray's Sporting Journal*, the *Economist*, raw intelligence), as well as what he doesn't (the blogs). "I don't blog," he says, as if clearing up a misconception. In April, though, the blogosphere was obsessed over a photo of Cheney fishing on the Snake. Many held that a reflection in Cheney's sunglasses revealed not a hand casting a flyrod, but a naked woman. When I ask Cheney about it, he breaks into a trouble-making grin. "I had a great guide that day."

He also offers several candid, and often funny, impressions of current political figures. Then immediately puts them off the record. Trying to drag them back on the record, as I attempt to do several times, proves futile. When I suggest to him that such secrecy and circumspection is precisely why his media image is in the crapper, he is unconcerned. "If I was interested in servicing my image," he says, "I wouldn't have become vice president. I had a good job."

That much-discussed job was one he was offered after impressing Halliburton executives while chewing the fat with them in the mid-90s at a fly-fishing camp. Loyal to his friends—some say to a fault—he gives a spirited defense of how unfairly his former colleagues have been publicly denigrated from their association with him. But he doesn't want me going into the particulars. "I didn't come out here to piss and moan," he says. "I came out here to fish."

And fish he does. Kelly feeds us many different flies throughout the day, but the money set-up seems to be a Rainy's hopper pattern on topwater with a lightning-bug nymph dropper dangling beneath it. (Pruett calls these the "Coors Light Cans," as its red and silver sheen looks like every college girl's favorite beer.)

Cheney is a good fisherman. A really good fisherman. We're not in the water 10 minutes before he's already had two hookups, while the only thing I've caught in the same duration is a stick that I mistook for a whitefish and the vice president's line.

As I'm in the back of the boat, it's my job to time his backcasts so that we keep firing like alternating pistons—a rhythm that takes some getting used to in such tight quarters, especially since he is a fast and frequent caster. There are no catastrophes, à la the hook in the neck, unless you count me wrapping a fly around the guide's glasses. (No skin was touched.) Another time, trying to set the hook on a fish and missing—something Cheney rarely does— his Copper Bob rubber-banded out of the water and came within inches of my face before wrapping around my rod as I was trying to get out a tangle, nearly

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turning me into the fly-fishing equivalent of Harry Whittington, Cheney's less-fortunate hunting partner.

I go fishless all morning, as Cheney hits for the cycle: browns and rainbows, cutties and hybrids. It makes me nostalgic for the day before, when I had the front of the boat. I remind Cheney and Kelly that I'd had a 15-fish outing on their river just yesterday. Nobody seems remotely impressed.

As we break for a fried-chicken boxed lunch on a gravel bar, I start feeling desperate and am thinking about turning to my big gun: the Pistol Pete, a woolly bugger-like fly that effectively mimics baitfish, but that has a little extra action with a propeller on front. I picked a brownie up near this spot on it the day before. I ask Cheney what he thinks and if he'd ever fish it. "If I had fished every other fly in my box, and none of them worked, then *maybe*," he says, as though I was defiling his water by chucking the equivalent of bubba bait.

As I try to interview him, Cheney tells me, 'You know the only reason I agreed to this? I wanted to see what kind of reporter had the cojones to convince his editors to pay for him to come fish the South Fork.'

Shamed, I still break out of Kelly's recommendation cycle, and pick a green Thompson's Hopper of my own, all foam and hackle and rubber legs. I immediately take a cutthroat out of a riffle as Cheney is still finishing his lunch. "I'm back," I say to nobody in particular, as if I'd been there before.

But I wasn't back. Cheney goes back to catching fish, I go back to getting skunked. While Cheney is not a braggart in the least, he is a proud fisherman, and so he appreciates the White House photographer, David Bohrer, following behind in a trailer boat, taking snaps of his catches before he cuts them loose. "Where's David?" he says after one cutthroat. "He's bored, he's off taking pictures of flowers," offers Kelly. "You can tell he's a short-timer," shrugs Cheney.

I step into the White House photographer role when Bohrer isn't present with my CVS disposable camera ("Let Matt get a picture of this," Cheney takes to telling Kelly) and start a loud patter of bellyaching about my bad turn of luck (refraining from the usual string of expletives, out of deference to Cheney's office). "You've got the same hoppers on that he does," Kelly offers, perhaps still stung that I briefly went outside his advised patterns or still ruffled that I almost blinded him in one eye. But I am beginning to see how it works: Cheney doesn't need to talk trash. He has people to do that for him.

Not that he doesn't talk any smack. At one point, when Kelly is netting one of Cheney's fish and about to cut it loose, Cheney says, "Wait a minute, do you want to let Matt get a look at that so he can see what he's missing?"

The fish deficit is starting to grow ridiculous.

I have time to think of all the reasons Cheney is outcatching me. For one, my drifts are getting screwed up by the oar and Cheney casting at too high an angle into my water, forcing my flies to drag more often than they should. For another, the guide seems to be setting him up on all the fish when the boat holds position. Then there is the front-of-the-boat problem. If it doesn't matter where you sit, why does he always take the front? When I mention this to Scarlett, he welcomes me to the back-of-the-boat club. Cheney's friends let him have the front of the boat since he's the vice president of the United States. "But he's got about four months left," says Scarlett. "Then he can do time in the back like everybody else."

But there is another reason, of course, that Cheney is outfishing me. It's probably the more important reason: He's a lot better fisherman. He is a fierce caster. He has pinpoint precision with his fly, throwing sliders under branches, lopping flies over tree limbs, dropping his hopper just off the bank's edge, making it look extra susceptible to a trout mugging, like a drunk falling off a curb.

As Kelly rows us alongside a steep rockface, with tiny crevices at the bottom where the current swirls by and fish are likely holding, Cheney perfectly sidearms a cast right into the pocket. His fly is inhaled by a greedy rainbow. It's like watching a mailman throw a letter through a door slot from 30 feet away. Even Kelly, who is no purveyor of flattery, says, "Now *that* was a cast."

We hit the end of our 12-mile float and exit the boat onto the ramp. Cheney does not count his fish, though I do, obsessively (I've caught 869 so far this year, back when I used to catch fish). I tell him what the damage is:

Dick Cheney: 20.

Me: 2.

He doesn't give me that stingy, trademark lopsided grin that looks like a broken egg sliding off a rock. His is the full-on smile of an ebullient child. He shows back-molars and dental work, everything. In several decades of watching him, I've never seen him smile this big.

I ask him how much I should tip the guide, but he's already laid one hundred bucks or so on him. "It's all right, I got him," he says. I try to get the vice president back, but he won't have it. "It's okay, I can afford it," he says. Plus, he adds, "It's a small price to pay for bragging rights." We

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Matt Labash tries to get Cheney on the record before the start of their 12-mile float on the Snake River.

WHITE HOUSE PHOTO BY DAVID BOHRER

bid each other adieu. He's off home and says that he has some pressing business there: He has to email my friends that he beat me 20 to 2.

The next day, I have lunch with Jack Dennis, a longtime friend and fishing guide of Cheney's. ("Don't believe anything he tells you," Cheney offered, when finding out where I was headed.) Dennis is a bit of a local legend. He has introduced fly-fishing to everyone from Harrison Ford to Arnold Palmer. He authors books, hosts fly-fishing shows, and lectures on the sport worldwide.

Some speculate that the reason Cheney gets along so famously with Dennis is that Dennis does all the talking. Cheney doesn't have to fill in any spaces. And though Dennis is indeed a verbal firehose of stories, recollections, and trivia, he also has a melancholic streak. His office in Jackson, which is adorned with everything from letters of thanks from baseball legend Ted Williams—who was impressed by his fly-tying—to landing nets with presidential seals, has a placard on his shelf inscribed with the words of Henry David Thoreau: "Many men go fishing all of their lives without knowing it is not fish they are after."

Dennis has fished with Cheney often over the years and has seen him at some peculiar times. There was the day not long before September 11, when Dennis was rowing Cheney and his daughter Liz, and a passenger jet flew close overhead on the way to the airport. Liz, says Dennis, asked her father if he was ever worried about a plane like that coming to hit him. "He looked at her and said, 'Why would they want to do that? All those people on that plane wanna live."

Dennis, who is a committed environmentalist, says Cheney has gotten a bad rap as a despoiler of the land, since he has often quietly worked behind the scenes, doing things like torpedoing prospective mines in Wyoming that would pollute treasured cutthroat fisheries. Once, when fishing, Dennis says, Cheney asked him, "How do you think fly-fishermen view me?" Dennis replied: "'I don't think they view you very well, as a lot of people don't. It's not because of your fishing ability or anything, I think it's just because of the mood of the country.' He said, 'Well, I understand that.' I said, 'If they all went fishing with you, that would be a different story.'"

Perhaps the strangest moment for Dennis, however, was one afternoon on the river, just days after Cheney had a heart defibrillator implanted. Dennis says Cheney was reclining in the boat with "his head leaned back—he'd

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never done anything like that. I went back to look and see if he was breathing." Cheney popped open one eye and asked, "What are you doing?"

"I'm checking to see if you're breathing," Dennis said.

"Well so what?" Cheney snapped back. "What would happen if I wasn't? Will you just not worry about me? Leave me alone and whatever happens happens. I can't think of a better place to die than right here."

I wrap up with Dennis and realize I have a few hours left of daylight, so I ask him where I should fish. He grabs my notebook and draws a map to an unmarked creek in Grand Teton National Park. I ask him what flies I should bring. "Just go," he says. "You're losing time."

The directions are confusing, and I get lost several times. Even the park rangers don't know where Dennis's spot is. But I finally find it, after my car nearly plows into a black bear loafing off into the woods. After driving six miles down a dirt path and descending on foot down a steep embankment, which nearly causes a rockslide, I find a huge, slow eddying pool that feeds a faster creek, which itself feeds into the Snake about a half a mile away. Sneaking up in the tall grass along the banks, I see a large cutthroat holding in the lazy current. But my first cast spooks him, as his shadow shoots downstream. I jump into the pool and wade down slowly, firing a 50-foot cast to drift a hopper past some downed limbs near the pool's tailout. A cutthroat explodes on it, and moments later I am holding this gleaming, brilliant, orange-hued fish in my hand, as the setting sun crowns the Tetons above me.

The fish has to be a 19-incher, though since I'm the only witness, I'm going to call it 20. It's the biggest trout I take during my trip by far, and it's enough of a fish to wipe yesterday's humiliation off the books. As I place the cutthroat back in the cool water, watching it dart away as it realizes it's regained its freedom, I'm reminded of all the Cheney haters, who hope to God that when his stint ends in four months he permanently hangs out his "Gone Fishing" sign. I'm not sure Cheney and his critics won't finally find some agreement.

There are worse things to wish on a man. ♦

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The Endgame in Iraq

As the baton is passed to a new commander and a new president, there is still delicate work to be done.

By Jack Keane, Frederick W. Kagan & Kimberly Kagan

On September 16, General Raymond Odierno will succeed General David Petraeus as commander of U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq. The surge strategy Petraeus and Odierno developed and executed in 2007 achieved its objectives: reducing violence in Iraq enough to allow political processes to restart, economic development to move forward, and reconciliation to begin. Violence has remained at historic lows even after the withdrawal of all surge forces and the handover of many areas to Iraqi control. Accordingly, President Bush has approved the withdrawal of 8,000 additional troops by February 2009.

With Barack Obama's recent declaration that the surge in Iraq has succeeded, it should now be possible to move beyond that debate and squarely address the current situation in Iraq and the future. Reductions in violence permitting political change were the goal of the surge, but they are not the sole measure of success in Iraq.

The United States seeks a free, stable, independent Iraq, with a legitimately elected representative government that can govern and defend its territory, is at peace with its neighbors, and is an ally of the United States in the war on terror. The Iraqi leadership has made important strides toward developing a new and inclusive political system that addresses the concerns of all Iraq's ethnic and sectarian groups. But it has also taken steps in the wrong direction. An understandable desire to seize on the reduction in violence to justify overly hasty force reductions and premature transfer of authority to Iraqis puts the hard-won gains of 2007 and 2008 at risk. Thus, the president's announcement of new troop withdrawals has come before we even know when Iraq's provincial elections will occur.

Reducing our troop strength solely on the basis of trends in violence also misses the critical point that the mission of American forces in Iraq is shifting rapidly from counterinsurgency to peace enforcement. The counterinsurgency fight that characterized 2007 continues mainly in areas of northern Iraq. The ability of organized enemy groups, either Sunni or Shia, to conduct large-scale military or terrorist operations and to threaten the existence of the Iraqi government is gone for now. No area of Iraq today requires the massive, violent, and dangerous military operations that American and Iraqi forces had to conduct over the last 18 months in order to pacify various places or restore them to government control. Although enemy networks and organizations have survived and are regrouping, they will likely need considerable time to rebuild their capabilities to levels that pose more than a local challenge—and intelligent political, economic, military, and police efforts can prevent them from rebuilding at all.

American troops continue to conduct counterterrorism operations against Al Qaeda in Iraq, which has not given up, and against Iranian-backed Special Groups, which are also reconstituting. U.S. forces support Iraqi forces conducting counterinsurgency operations in the handful of areas where any significant insurgent capability remains. But mostly our troops are enforcing the peace.

General Jack Keane (USA, Ret.) is the former vice-chief of staff of the Army. Frederick W. Kagan, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, is a contributing editor to The Weekly Standard. *Kimberly Kagan is president of the Institute for the Study of War.*

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Generals Raymond Odierno and David Petraeus testify before the Senate Armed Services Committee in May.

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In ethnically mixed areas, American troops are seen as impartial arbiters and mediators. In predominantly Shia or Sunni areas, they are seen as guarantors of continued safety, destroying the justification for illegal militias. American brigades also play critical roles in economic reconstruction, not by spending American money but by helping Iraqis spend their own money. American staffs help local Iraqi leaders develop prioritized lists of their needs, budgets to match those priorities, and plans for executing those budgets. American troops support the Provincial Reconstruction Teams that mentor Iraqi provincial leaders and help local communities communicate their needs to the central government. American soldiers provide essential support to Iraqi soldiers and police working hard to develop their ability to function on their own.

Indeed, American combat brigades have become the principal enablers of economic and political development in Iraq. When an American brigade is withdrawn from an area, there is nothing to take its place—all of these functions go unperformed. Clearly, then, the number of brigades needed in Iraq should be tied not to the level of violence but to the roles the Americans perform and the importance of those roles to the further development of Iraq as a stable and peaceful state.

But American brigades do more than that. They also give us leverage at every level to restrain malign actors within the Iraqi government and to insist that Iraqi leaders make concessions and take political risks they would rather avoid. The notion, popular in some American political discussions, that withdrawing our forces increases our leverage is nonsensical. The presence of 140,000 American troops on the ground in Iraq requires the Iraqi leadership to pay attention to America's suggestions in a way that nothing else can. Every brigade that leaves reduces our leverage just when we need it most.

For all the progress made to date, the next president will face significant challenges in Iraq. In recent testimony, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates enumerated them: "the prospect of violence in the lead-up to elections, worrisome reports about sectarian efforts to slow the assimilation of the Sons of Iraq into the Iraqi security forces, Iranian influence, the very real threat that al Qaeda continues to pose, and the possibility that Jaysh al-Mahdi could return."

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The existence of malign sectarian actors in the Iraqi parliament and in the prime minister's inner circle is not news. Nor is it news that Iraqi politicians, elected under a closed-list system that emphasized ethnosectarian identity at the expense of political interest, have weak electoral bases and much reason to fear the results of open and honest elections. It is similarly well known that Iran seeks to drive the United States out of Iraq and has been putting tremendous pressure on Iraq's leaders to obey Tehran and reject Washington. These three factors help explain the development of significant negative trends in Iraq in recent months: the downward spiral of negotiations over the Strategic Framework Agreement, delays in the passage of an electoral law, escalating tensions along the Arab-Kurd border, and Iraqi government attacks on certain Sons of Iraq groups in and around Baghdad.

American policies and Iraqi mistakes may be combining to undermine the long-term prospects for success. These trends can be reversed, with care, over the coming months if the United States can summon some strategic patience.

Odierno, the new commander of coalition forces in Iraq

ASSOCIATED PRESS

American errors have contributed to these developments. At the outset of negotiations over the Strategic Framework Agreement, for instance, we should have offered Iraq a security guarantee. Iraq's signing a Strategic Framework Agreement would have openly and publicly committed themselves to the United States—and against Iran, in the zero-sum thinking of Tehran. It was only reasonable that Maliki and others in the Iraqi government should have expected an American commitment to match their own, and we should have given it to them. But American domestic politics made that impossible.

Leading congressmen and senators insisted that a security guarantee would raise the Strategic Framework Agreement to the level of a treaty requiring Senate ratification—which is true. They also made clear that no such ratification would be forthcoming if the document bound the next administration. The Bush administration therefore had to tell Baghdad at the outset that America would not match the commitment we were asking the Iraqis to make with an equal commitment of our own. American domestic politics also prevented the administration from placing the security agreement in the larger context of a U.S.-Iraqi strategic partnership, since that concept was ridiculed by those who refused to accept the possibility of success in Iraq.

The Iranians sensed an opportunity and responded with a massive public information campaign in Iraq and a virulent private campaign to put pressure on Iraq's leaders. America's refusal to offer a long-term security guarantee gave weight to the constant Iranian refrain that Iran will always be there, while America will ultimately leave Iraq to its fate. Shrewdly refusing to admit the degree of direct Iranian pressure, Maliki and his associates used the cloak of "Iraqi sovereignty" to conceal their uneasiness at taking responsibility for making a deal with the United States—uneasiness not before their own people, but before Tehran. As a result, the negotiations have dragged on, Iraqi demands have increased, and it is possible that Maliki will now wait until after the American election to see who wins—all because domestic political constraints prevented the Bush administration from making the necessary opening bid.

Maliki has been using "Iraqi sovereignty" to do more than delay those negotiations, however. He has also used it to insist on the accelerated transfer of Iraq's cities, especially Baghdad, to Iraqi control and the withdrawal

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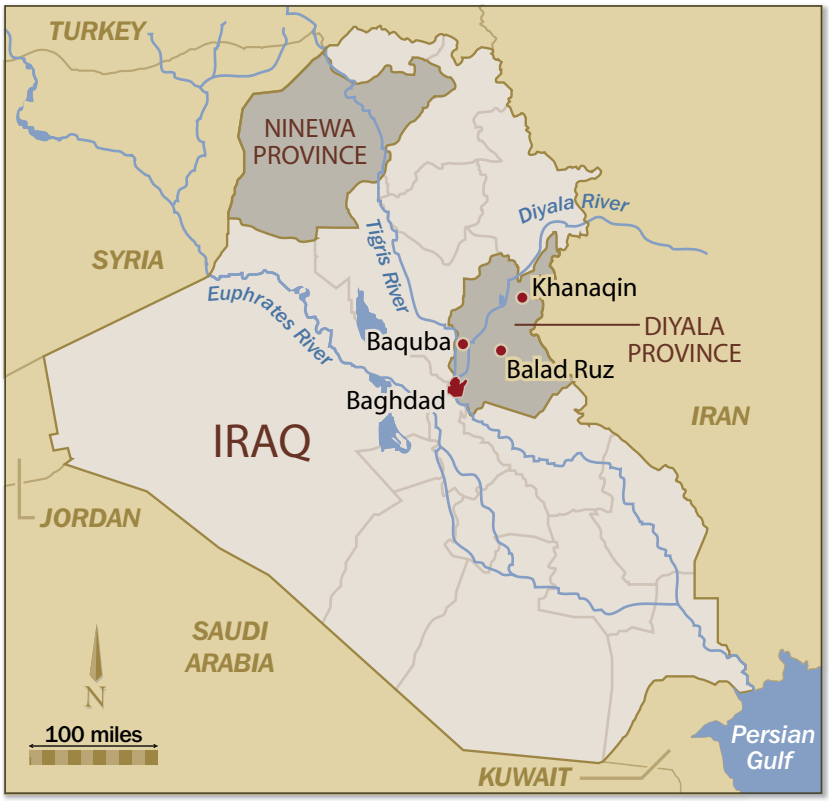
of American forces from those cities. As a result, the problems that premature transition can cause are on display in the city of Baquba, the capital of Diyala Province northeast of Baghdad.

Diyala has always been one of the most challenging provinces in Iraq because of its swirling mix of Kurds with Sunni and Shia Arabs and its proximity to Baghdad. It served in the past as a staging area for Shia militias and al Qaeda terrorists launching attacks in Baghdad. It was pacified in 2007 with a great deal of hard fighting that resulted in the defeat of illegal Shia militias and the capitulation of the local Sunni insurgent groups, many of whom joined the Sons of Iraq, volunteer security forces organized and initially paid by the United States. More remained to be done in Diyala as the surge ended, however. Surge operations had cleared Baquba and areas further east, but not the rim of the province from Khanaqin along the Iranian border and then through Balad Ruz toward Baghdad. The end of the surge meant the withdrawal of significant American forces from Diyala, so U.S. troops largely turned responsibility for the city of Baquba over to the Iraqis and moved out to clear the peripheral areas of the province.



Rumors began circulating that the Iraqi government believed it would have to re-clear Baquba, even though violence remained low and American leaders did not agree. In August 2008, the Iraqi security forces, with limited support from American troops, did re-clear the city—but their targets were primarily leaders in the Sons of Iraq movement and members of the local government and community that had supported them. This action—which could not have taken place if American forces had continued to patrol the city—was part of a larger effort by Maliki to weaken the urban Sons of Iraq. It appears that the current Iraqi leadership has recognized that it must allow the Sunni tribal movements, particularly in Anbar, to organize and gain power in their own communities, but it sees the urban Sons of Iraq movements as political threats to its power.

The return of the Sunni Iraq Islamic party (IIP) to the government appears to have created an unholy alliance between Maliki and IIP leader (and Iraqi vice president) Tariq al-Hashimi aimed at weakening grassroots Sunni political movements in and around Baghdad and ensuring that the unpopular and unrepresentative IIP continues to wield power after provincial elections. A similar alliance is operating in Ninewa Province, where Kurdish leaders appear to have joined with the IIP to ensure that they will continue to have influence in the largely Arab province when provincial elections eliminate the current disproportionate Kurdish sway in the provincial government. This Kurdish-IIP alliance helps explain why there are virtually no Sons of Iraq in Ninewa. The extremely limited American presence in Ninewa, as in Baquba, has enabled these developments, which may call into question the legitimacy of the upcoming provincial elections in some areas.

Maliki's actions may reflect the continued powerful influence of malign sectarian actors among his advisers, or it may reflect the determination of a temporarily strong political leader confronting elections that are likely to weaken his base. The specter of Iranian power combines with the enormous question mark hanging over the future of American support to make Maliki look to his own resources to stabilize his position. Again, contrary to conventional wisdom, the threat of American withdrawal and America's refusal to guarantee the security of Iraq and its constitutional processes presses Iraq's leaders to make bad decisions, not good ones.

Whatever Maliki's motivations, however, the bottom

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line is clear. Although a dramatic increase in violence or the rebirth of a large-scale Sunni insurgency in the next six months is unlikely, it is possible that American policies are combining with Iraqi mistakes to undermine the long-term prospects for success. These trends can be reversed, with care, over the coming months if the United States can summon some strategic patience.

There is no question that we should be able to start withdrawing significant numbers of American forces from Iraq in 2009 and accelerating our withdrawal in 2010. Assuming that Iraqi provincial elections in 2008 or early 2009, and parliamentary elections in 2009 or 2010, are accepted as legitimate by the Iraqi people and the international community, it is also highly likely that we can continue to withdraw from Iraq's cities, including Baghdad, and move from a patrolling role to an advisory and support role in the same period. But the timing of force reductions and withdrawals from urban areas is critical, and the current pace is too fast.

As long as the outcome remains in doubt, we must never imagine that the situation is under control and we can put it on autopilot. The relief of getting violence under control and casualties down naturally produces a desire to declare victory and withdraw. That is a danger to be avoided at all costs.

It appears from media reports that General Petraeus initially proposed no reduction in the number of U.S. brigades below the pre-surge levels, and that was certainly the right recommendation. Current force levels may, in fact, already be too low. At all events, we must see Iraq through the upcoming two elections, pressing the government to conduct them fairly and inclusively as well as ensuring that enemy groups do not disrupt them with violence. Doing so requires a significant American presence on the ground in Iraq's population centers, where, in addition to all the other key non-combat roles they play, American soldiers are the canaries in the mine shaft. They know before anyone else when Iraqi leaders at any level are starting to play games that can undermine mission success.

We should therefore not withdraw any brigades from Iraq before the provincial elections have occurred and the results have been certified and accepted. We should not accept timelines for the departure of American troops from Iraq's cities, particularly Baghdad, before the parliamentary elections of 2009. We should continually press the Iraqi government not simply to pay the Sons of Iraq (as it has announced it will do beginning in October), but to bring most of them into the political process. Some of the Sons of Iraq were leaders of the insurgency and should have no place in Iraqi politics, but in its Baquba operation, the Iraqi government was not sufficiently discriminating in whom it sought to exclude (much less detain). We must also support the Iraqi government in its efforts to push Kurdish militias out of Diyala and Ninewa provinces.

This is not a matter of Iraqi sovereignty. American troops will not stay anywhere in Iraq if ordered by the Iraqi government to leave. We are not going to depose Maliki or retake control of Baghdad. We are not going to force the Iraqis to do anything. And, above all, we are not going to maintain a large military presence in Iraq indefinitely. But we are engaged in continual negotiations with the Iraqi government about what our forces will do and what Iraqi forces will do, and we have tremendous leverage in those negotiations.

For too long, we have allowed domestic American political considerations to reduce our leverage and weaken our bargaining position, and we have refused to recognize the critical role the presence of our combat forces plays in keeping us in the game at all. When America provides combat forces to maintain internal or external security in a foreign state, it acquires the right to bargain hard for what it thinks is best for the common interest, even when the host state's government does not agree. We have engaged in such hard bargaining in South Korea and in Europe, and it is a normal part of alliance relationships. We must bargain harder in Iraq and give ourselves the tools and leverage we need to succeed.

Above all, we must recognize that there is never a glide path in war. As long as the outcome remains in doubt, we must never imagine that the situation is under control and we can put it on autopilot and ignore it. The relief of getting Iraqi violence under control and American casualties down turns naturally into a desire to declare victory and withdraw. That is a danger to be avoided at all costs. This administration must ensure that it hands its successor not only a relatively peaceful Iraq, but an Iraq that is headed in the right direction. ♦

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He Knew Too Much

The killing of Stalin's American-born agent

BY HARVEY KLEHR

Oggins when arrested, 1939

The collapse of the Soviet Union and release of snippets of information from its voluminous espionage files has brought back to life a number of long-forgotten, and sometimes never-known, spies whose exploits and antics have reminded us that truth is sometimes stranger than any fiction John Le Carré could invent. This newest entry in the genre exhibits both the benefits flowing from these excavations and the shortcomings perhaps inevitably associated with them.

Isaiah (Cy) Oggins was one of the earliest Soviet agents recruited in the United States. Born in Willimantic, Connecticut, in 1898 to Russian emigres, he worked for Soviet intelligence from the mid-1920s until his arrest in Moscow in 1939. Remarkably, he became the subject of an official American government inquiry during World War II and was actually interviewed by American diplomats before Soviet officials decided it was too risky to allow further contact or to release him. He was murdered in prison in 1947. His case briefly came to public attention in the 1990s, when the Yeltsin government investigated the Soviet murders of American citizens and possible imprisonment of Vietnam POWs.

Harvey Klehr is the Andrew Mellon professor of politics and history at Emory. His latest book, with John Earl Haynes, is In Denial: Historians, Communism & Espionage.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROBIN OGGINS

Meier, a Moscow-based journalist, first became interested in Oggins in 2000 while interviewing survivors of the Gulag. Learning that an American had been kept in Norilsk, a remote camp in Siberia, he eventually uncovered his name and was able to locate and befriend his son, Robin Oggins, a medieval historian at SUNY Binghamton. Obtaining some of Oggins's KGB file, Meier has also scoured American diplomatic files and received materials under the Freedom of Information Act. The result is a fascinating story of an idealist marching to his own ruin, but one that suffers from enough major gaps to frustrate readers, and forces Meier to resort to speculation rather than evidence to fill in details of Oggins's life and exploits.

The Lost Spy
An American in Stalin's Secret Service
by Andrew Meier
Norton, 304 pp., $25.95

Oggins was converted to radicalism while a student at Columbia during World War I. After briefly teaching in New York City he returned to Columbia to work on a dissertation, but was forced to drop out for financial reasons in 1922. He met his future wife, Nerma, at the Rand School, a center for socialist education. She was a fiery Yiddish-speaking Communist functionary under whose influence he joined the Communist party in 1924, one year before his Columbia acquaintance, Whittaker Chambers.

Recruited for Soviet espionage sometime in the mid-20s, Oggins made his first trip as a courier to Europe in 1926; by 1928 he and his wife were working out of a safe house in Berlin, where Oggins posed as a dealer in art objects. An unexpected encounter with old friends from New York—Sidney Hook and his first wife, later memorialized in Hook's autobiography—suggested that Oggins was already nervous about his new career, confessing to being both tired and lonely.

The couple left Berlin in 1930 for Paris, where their assignment seems to have been spying on various White Russian exiles, particularly Romanovs, and where their son, Robin, was born in 1931. Following a French crackdown on Soviet operations in 1933, Oggins traveled to Spain and the United States before undertaking an assignment in China where he apparently was used to spy on the Japanese.

Posing as a dealer in Asian antiquities, and later as the American representative of an Italian company, he lived in Darien, Connecticut. Meier calls it "the height of his espionage career." Oggins returned to Paris via Moscow in the spring of 1938, but quickly returned to the Soviet capital for unexplained reasons and was arrested in February 1939. Convicted the following year, despite denying he had committed treason, Cy Oggins vanished into the Gulag.

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Trying to reconstruct the life of a spy can be like squeezing assumptions and might-have-beens into hard facts, and Andrew Meier cannot avoid the trap. Although he suggests that Oggins was employed by the GRU, Soviet Military Intelligence, he also believes he was an agent of the Communist International, and later has him working for the OGPU, the regular intelligence service. Agents were sometimes switched from one Soviet intelligence apparatus to another, but it is a sign of how little is known of Oggins's activities that even his immediate employer is unclear.

More problematically, Meier speculates that the safe house in Berlin may have been used to manufacture fake passports or to copy stolen documents. Then he suggests it could have been used in a counterfeiting scheme orchestrated by two Latvian-born Soviet assets, Nicholas Dozenberg and Alfred Tilton. The lack of evidence leads to speculation even Meier calls "unlikely." Oggins, he claims, must have known the two, even though "the evidence is scant, but it is difficult to imagine how Cy could not have encountered both men."

He tries to connect Oggins to all kinds of major Soviet intelligence operations with claims that he "must have" or "should have" been involved with, or known, to other spies, but there is simply no documented or oral evidence. He believes that the Oggins must have known Max and Grace Granich, Soviet operatives in China, but there is no evidence. Nor did Whittaker Chambers ever mention him, despite assertions that he must have known about his activities.

Returning to the United States in 1939, Nerma may have continued to work with the Communist underground, although the evidence is, again, thin. As a loyal Communist, she remained silent about her missing husband. The Oggins saga, however, soon entered the documentary record. Remarkably, the United States government undertook an effort to free him. A former Polish POW who had crossed paths with Oggins in a labor camp informed Polish authorities about him, and in February 1942 the State Department learned that an American citizen was in the Gulag.

American authorities in Russia demanded to meet with Oggins, as provided for in the agreement establishing diplomatic relations in 1933. After a six-month delay, so Soviet authorities could allow him to put on weight and partially recover his health, Oggins met with American diplomats in a Moscow prison. He told them he had not had a lawyer at his trial or pleaded guilty, but admitted he had used a false passport to enter the Soviet Union. He mentioned nothing of spying and asked to come home, warning that he would not long survive. The NKVD representative monitoring the meeting agreed to provide photographs so the U.S. government could verify his citizenship, which it soon did.

Oggins before execution, 1947

While an investigation quickly established that Oggins was, indeed, an American citizen, the State Department and FBI also concluded that he was a Soviet spy as well. Despite that, the State Department was willing to lend his wife nearly $1,200 to pay for his trip home. Although Nerma later told her son that it was the United States which prevented his father from returning home, Meier has documented that it was, instead, the Soviet Union which concluded that it was too risky to allow Oggins to come back to America with his knowledge of Soviet agents and operations.

Returned to the Gulag, Cy Oggins was taken to an NKVD medical laboratory in Moscow in 1947 and injected with curare. The Yeltsin government discovered a memo from KGB chief Victor Abakumov to Stalin and Molotov recommending he be liquidated; Pavel Sudoplatov, a longtime KGB officer imprisoned for 15 years after a purge of the intelligence services in 1953, recounted in his memoirs his belief that Oggins was actually a double agent and that Nerma had cooperated with the FBI in 1942 after she learned about his imprisonment. Meier justifiably treats that self-serving story as fiction, but puts forward an even more improbable explanation for his execution.

Cy Oggins's superior in China, Max Steinberg, a mysterious Soviet operative who defected to Switzerland in the late 1930s, returned to the Soviet Union in 1956 and was imprisoned a year later. Meier concludes, not unreasonably, that Steinberg's defection had triggered Oggins's arrest. But he then claims that Oggins "was killed because of HUAC"—The House Unamerican Activities Committee. The red scare in Washington meant that, if he returned, Oggins could be forced to testify and expose important Soviet spy rings.

That explanation, however, begs the question of why Oggins was not just left to rot in the Gulag, and whether he had any more knowledge of unknown Soviet spy rings than Chambers, Igor Gouzenko, Elizabeth Bentley, and Louis Budenz, all of whom had already exposed Soviet sources.

Informed by the State Department that her husband had died in prison in 1947, Nerma Oggins survived until 1995, dying at the age of 97. Her son explained to Meier that she had been consumed by guilt, but had never acknowledged what she and her husband had done to destroy their lives. ♦

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROBIN OGGINS

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A Laugh Supreme

What would happen if Judge Judy became Justice Judy? **BY BARTON SWAIM**

There sat Senator Kennedy of Massachusetts, having commanded his staffers to find the worst on Judge Alito, reading from some objectionable article that Alito hadn't written but which had appeared in a magazine published by a society to which he had once belonged.

Wasn't this proof that Samuel Alito was little better than a Klansman? Alito's wife, seated just behind the nominee, began visibly weeping, so undone was she by the experience of seeing her husband slandered on television. It was left to the twangy Senator Graham of South Carolina (one of Washington's originals, God bless him) to apologize to Mrs. Alito for his colleague's sickening performance.

It takes a talented parodist to parody a parody like that, and Christopher Buckley does the job admirably. *Supreme Courtship* begins with President Donald Vanderdamp unable to get his Supreme Court nominees past the Judiciary Committee. One formidably qualified nominee is discovered to have written, at age 12, a review of *To Kill a Mockingbird* for his school paper in which he concluded, "Though the picture is overall OK, it's also kind of boring in other parts." His name forever associated with racism of the most diabolical kind, his nomination goes no further.

The committee chairman, and President Vanderdamp's most hated political enemy, is Senator Dexter Mitchell of Connecticut. Buckley is fortunate that he chose to base this character (if I'm right) not on Kennedy but on another prominent member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, a man who may be the nation's next vice president. Well, you tell me.

Supreme Courtship
by Christopher Buckley
Twelve, 304 pp., $24.99

> Dexter Mitchell loved—loved—to talk. He uttered his first full sentence at age fourteen months and hadn't stopped since. . . . Once, famously, on his way into a state funeral at the National Cathedral, a reporter for one of the smaller cable TV news channels stepped forward to ask for a brief comment. One hour and fifteen minutes later, Senator Mitchell was still talking as the casket emerged . . . He was good-looking, in a shiny sort of way. He'd had his front teeth capped. They were now so blindingly white that when he bared them, you could almost hear a little *tingg!* And see a star of light reflect off the incisor. . . . Successive campaign advisors had tried without success to get him to give briefer answers, but nothing had stemmed the logorrheic tide, the tsunami of subordinate clauses and parenthetical asides, the inexorable mudslide of anecdotage. . . . He had run for president three times.

One night, as Vanderdamp watches a reality TV court show called *Courtroom Six*, he gets the idea to nominate the show's sharp-tongued and sexy star, Judge Pepper Cartwright, to the High Court. Vanderdamp's advisers try to dissuade him, urging him instead to appoint an American Indian called Rainwater; but he insists, and soon Pepper, having agreed, begins her preparation by studying such monumental cases as *Nguyen* v. *Rite-Aid* and *Gretchen's Frozen Pike* v. *Milwaukee Block Ice*.

Once confirmed—Judge Cartwright, a Texan with a wicked sense of humor, upstages Senator Mitchell in the hearings—her no-nonsense approach to judging cases begins to "grow," as erstwhile conservative justices' views often do, and she very quickly finds herself ruling in favor of, *inter alia*, a bank robber who failed to murder a deputy because his gun jammed and who has therefore sued the gun manufacturer.

Meanwhile, Pepper's husband, and the producer of *Courtroom Six*, has lost his best show. Watching his wife's confirmation hearings has given him a new idea, however: He approaches the gregarious and ever-grinning Senator Biden—sorry, Mitchell—and asks him if he'd like to take the lead role in a new show called *POTUS*.

"Like *The West Wing*?" asks Senator Mitchell. Buckley's footnote: "Popular TV series about a hand-wringing liberal U.S. president and his hand-wringing liberal staff; based on the novel *Let Freedom Wring*."

Christopher Buckley

Mitchell's acting is superb and his show's a hit, mainly because (as one suspects was the case with Martin Sheen) he stays mentally in the role of president: "His wife, Terry, didn't quite get it and seemed to resent it when he told her not to 'tie up the hotline,' but generally it worked." Naturally he uses the popularity thus gained to launch a fourth presidential campaign, and the ensuing contest between Mitchell and Vanderdamp winds up—where else?—in the Supreme Court.

Christopher Buckley has a talent for inventing stories that seem almost

Barton Swaim is the author of a forthcoming book on 19th-century Scottish literary critics.

JOHN HUBA/ ART & COMMERCE

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to write themselves. How could a novel about a president appointing a TV judge to serve on the Supreme Court *not* be funny? It brings to mind Dr. Johnson's remark about *Gulliver's Travels*: "When once you have thought of big men and little men, it is very easy to do all the rest." That wasn't true in the case of *Gulliver*, and *Supreme Courtship* could easily have been a mediocre book. It isn't.

There are, of course, the hilarious explanatory paragraphs Buckley's fans relish—"Ishiguro 'Mike' Haro was the first Japanese-American Supreme Court justice. . . . He was not popular with the law clerks—even his own—who made puns on his surname's similarity to the Asian mispronunciation of 'hello'"—but Buckley also deserves credit for creating a well wrought urn. *Supreme Courtship*'s plot is sophisticated, its style crisp and distinctive, and Buckley has mastered the difficult art of rendering conversations among six, seven, or eight people in a way that's easy to follow—and funny. The Senate confirmation and Court hearing scenes are the best.

One criticism, though. Buckley's portrayal of his Texan heroine approaches Hollywood predictability. Whether this will make a difference to those readers who aren't from the South, I don't know. But I can assure non-southern readers—and I say this as one of Lindsey Graham's constituents—that a sizable majority of southerners do not use nonsensical expressions like "pecking at each other like a couple of snake-bit hens." Many of them are not, and do not know, any TV evangelists, nor are most of them given to chewing tobacco and spitting, audibly, while on the telephone. And most educated southerners understand that there are certain social circumstances in which one should avoid the use of words like "cattywompus"—which, by the way, is an adjective, not a noun, as Buckley thinks.

Granted, this is a satirical novel, and existing social practices must be exaggerated for the purpose. But this is pretty well-worn territory, isn't it? Still, *Supreme Courtship* is a delight to read for many reasons, among them its splendid send-up of the senior senator from Delaware. Buy it while it's hot. ♦

Murray's Truths

No. 1: Half of American students are below average.

BY LIAM JULIAN

Charles Murray has written a bracing book about education, one determined not only to upset apple carts, but explode them. In varied ways he has succeeded, and for that we should be thankful; the conversations of self-described education reformers tend toward the stultifying and could generally benefit from some well-placed pyrotechnics.

His big point is this: American education suffers from a surfeit of romanticism. It is too idealistic and pursues goals it will not and cannot attain. By blindly believing that all students will be able to achieve at high academic levels, and by ignoring reams of facts that belie such a notion, the educational system does significant harm to the students it purports to help. The individual talents and aspirations of millions of young people have been sacrificed on educational romanticism's altar.

Real Education
Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality
by Charles Murray
Crown Forum, 224 pp., $24.95

One of the truths Murray believes the romantics don't accept—but must—is that too many people are going to college.

That higher education is overly inclusive is certainly counterintuitive, especially when there exists such widespread agreement that the more Americans in college (which Murray defines as a four-year residential institution) the better. Politicians spanning the hues from navy to vermilion strive to make university education widely accessible, and the country's high school curricula typically have, as their goal, the production of graduates who matriculate at college.

Liam Julian, a writer and editor at the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, is a research fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution.

Murray dissents. He finds profoundly mistaken the prevailing college-or-bust mindset. For starters, it ignores the blatant fact that millions of high school students have absolutely no desire to attend college, and that their professional goals are in no way furthered by sitting through professorial soliloquies on Milton or calculus.

For many such students—teenagers who have recognized that their talents and interests are not of the academic variety—high school becomes a terrible bore and unbearable waste of time. And some 30 percent of them make the decision to drop out, forgo a diploma, and get a job.

But what of the many students who *do* graduate from high school and go on to enroll in a four-year university? There were 1.5 million of them in 2005. Murray writes that many don't belong in college because they aren't capable of doing college-level work. Thus, a predictable result:

Of those who entered college in 1995, only 58 percent had gotten their B.A. five academic years later. Another 14 percent were still enrolled. If we assume that half of the 14 percent eventually get their B.A.s, about a third of all those who enter college leave without one.

Those who leave have, of course, squandered precious time, and many are newly saddled with mounds of debt, for which they have nothing to show.

Another logical, foreseeable result of an inflation in the number of those who attend college is grade inflation, which leads to degree inflation. By pushing into college those students who don't want to go, don't need to go, and aren't prepared to go, our educational system

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has produced scads of people who possess college diplomas of rising flaccidity.

To wit, in July, the *Wall Street Journal* ran an article entitled "The Declining Value of Your College Degree," which detailed that "the typical weekly salary of a worker with a bachelor's degree, adjusted for inflation, didn't rise last year from 2006 and was 1.7% below the 2001 level." Certainly there are sundry culprits here, but the proliferation of meaningless B.A.s doesn't help.

Of course, this trend is more debilitating for those who *don't* possess college degrees, even flaccid ones. Now it has become common for employers to require of all job applicants a bachelor's degree, regardless of whether the responsibilities of the position in question actually require a college education—have anything at all *to do* with a college education—or not. Those high-school graduates who, after evaluating their professional goals, decided that attending a vocational school or community college made sense may be well qualified for certain jobs from which they are nonetheless peremptorily excluded. So they trudge off to four-year institutions, and the cycle continues.

Murray's diagnosis of America's everyone-to-college romanticism is spot on—as is his assertion, later in *Real Education*, that America is inadequately educating its most talented pupils, as well as other suggestions about expanding educational choice. But his diagnosis of the everyone-can-learn romanticism—namely, that many American students, despite improvements in their K-12 schooling, can never make appreciable academic gains—is less spot-on.

Let's start with what Murray gets right on this point. That we "do not live in Lake Wobegon," that "half of children are below average," is incontrovertibly true. Incontrovertibly untrue, as Murray also points out, is the romantic notion that all or most pupils can be academic high-achievers. That the No Child Left Behind Act requires every student—100 percent—to be "proficient" in mathematics and reading by 2014 is fantastical stuff, accomplished only if state governments set their individual definitions of "proficiency" at subterranean levels (which many have been busily doing). But here's the problem. Just because 50 percent of children will always be below average, it does not follow that the average itself cannot be shifted—that what it means to be "average" cannot be substantially improved. And it does not follow that a lot of students in dismal, depressing, decaying public schools could not be learning a lot more than they currently are.

Murray believes that this argument—"the schools are so bad that low-ability students can learn a lot more even if their ability is unchanged"—is "at the heart of the educational romanticism that pervades American education."

His first salvo against it is a history of the academic improvement of low-achievers. "There is a point," he writes, "in every developed country at which children who are below average in their underlying academic ability make a great leap forward in their academic achievement: when they start to go to school."

In the United States, after universal education was established, academic gains quickly diminished. Murray musters lots of data to prove that, since the 1970s, America has seen no significant improvement in the academic achievement of its students, and that to expect such improvement in the future is unwise.

Yet it is rather odd to look backward when making a case for what can and cannot be accomplished going forward. The fact is that America's modern public schools—their basic structure, the composition of their staffs, their curricula—are much the same as their '70s counterparts. Public schools were inefficiently designed 40 years ago, and they remain the same today, sputtering educational Apple IIs, the obsolescence of which is still ferociously protected by those interests (teachers' unions, for example) that benefit from it.

If we can begin to reform the rotten structure that undergirds American education, why is it foolhardy to believe that good results will follow? It further puzzles when Murray, after estimating that about 11 percent of the nation's students attend class in inner-city schools, and then figuring that "less than 10 percent of all K-12 students" attend "the worst schools," claims that even if we rescued every one of those pupils from their dreadful environments, it "would only tweak the national numbers." This assumes that the only students receiving sub-par educations are those in ramshackle, inner-city classrooms, which is a bit much to swallow. Are we really to believe that every pupil in suburban (and rural) public schools is receiving a top-flight education and achieving at the peak of his ability?

Murray writes that he supports vouchers and charter schools—public schools that frequently have non-unionized staffs and are freed from much district-level bureaucracy—but not because these innovations improve

H. ARMSTRONG ROBERTS / CORBIS

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the academic achievement of their students. He notes that private schools and charter schools offer real advantages "in curricula that typically provide more substance in subjects like history, geography, literature, and civics," and they "often provide supportive intellectual environments for hard-working students who, in public schools, are often subjected to peer pressure *not* to study."

Ignoring, for the moment, the fact that so many private and charter schools have *indeed* worked academic miracles with formerly low-achieving students, I wonder why Murray thinks it good that these schools offer varied curricula, more educational substance, and supportive intellectual environments if (as he writes) none of this will ever improve the academic test scores "among low-ability students who would otherwise go to normal public schools."

All of which returns us to his point that "at the heart of the educational romanticism that pervades American education" is the belief that low-ability students can learn much more than they are currently. Murray is either right or wrong here, depending on his statement's circumstance.

If he means to derogate educational romantics' taking the belief too far, as they often do—when they try to push all students to college, or when they expect that every pupil can pass a high-school exit exam, or when they demand all students be "proficient" by 2014—then Murray's point is a sharp one. But if his statement is meant to suggest that many youngsters of low academic ability are *not* being educationally shortchanged and written off—that they're *not* challenged by their teachers to achieve at academic levels they could reach, that they're *not* capable of learning basic academic skills, such as how to read and write and do simple math, without which one is lost, or that they're academically hopeless—then this one of Murray's conclusions is simply untrue.

Educational romanticism deserves no pity. Let us be wary, though, of educational defeatism, our approach to which must be similarly merciless. ♦

History vs. Nature

For Yeats, the natural world is the symbol of his times.

BY JOHN FELSTINER

"I had still the ambition, formed in Sligo in my teens, of living in imitation of Thoreau on Innisfree."

Born in 1865, rooted in west Ireland's County Galway, William Butler Yeats died shortly before World War II broke out in 1939. Spanning the decades from Victorian to modern, his poems took on every question: love, sexuality, transience, age, death, local place and legend, mythic past and visionary future, nobility vis-à-vis common folk, country and city, dreams and responsibilities, private as against public, spiritual and earthly life, nature versus history. All this mattered in the world at large and vitally in his craft. "Out of the quarrel with others we make rhetoric," he said, "of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry."

One day in London, feeling homesick, Yeats suddenly remembered a small island in a lake near Sligo, and Thoreau at Walden Pond. Published in 1892 (the year John Muir founded California's Sierra Club), "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" springs from that Romantic yearning toward a distant mythic place.

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

Though Yeats's yen for Innisfree (pronounced "Innishfree," meaning Heather Island) hasn't much in common with the cabin Thoreau actually built on a pond near Boston, he feels a kindred impulse to get away from society and revive the spirit. As Thoreau says in *Walden*, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation."

I will arise and go now. Knowingly or not, Yeats is echoing Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*. "Travel" begins, "I should like to rise and go / . . . Where below another sky / Parrot islands anchored lie." Stevenson himself had gone to Samoa, whence he wrote praising Yeats's "artful simplicity" in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." He doesn't mention the borrowing. In any case, Yeats reaching toward islands "below another sky" taps into childlike genius.

About poetry we often wonder, Does style drive content or vice-versa? The answer is yes. "Innisfree" was Yeats's first lyric with "my own music," for music means every bit as much as meaning here. An early draft even has noontide not midnight "all a glimmer," and midnight not noon "a purple glow" of heather! Evidently the facts of nature yield, to help get him from "pavements gray" to "lake water lapping."

Happily for the music, Yeats recited "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" on the BBC, an old man voicing a young

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man's poem. "I am going to read my poems with great *em*phasis upon the *rhythm*," he announces. "It gave me a devil of a lot of trouble to get [them] into verse, and that is why I *will* not read them as if they were prose."

We then hear a throaty resonant chant of weighted cadences and Irish inflections: "Oy will uh*roy-y-se* ond go now, ond *go-o-o* to Innish*free-e-e* . . . " Each stanza gets a startling music on the last word, raising the pitch for "bee-loud *gla-a-ade*" and "linnet's *wi-i-ings*." Then three stressed syllables close the poem, "deep heart's core," rising from a profundo "*deep hahrt's*" to a higher drawn-out tone on "*caw-w-wr*."

Poetry is not ordinary speech, it partakes of inspiration, vision, oracle, carrying us from humdrum *here* to a mythic *there*. Yeats's "there" itself resounds four times in six lines.

Civilization's dream is to get away from it all to another place, classical Arcadia, Coleridge's Xanadu, the "Country-green" of Keats's nightingale. Yeats goes into Celtic woods:

Who will go drive with Fergus now,
And pierce the deep wood's woven shade,
And dance upon the level shore?
Young man, lift up your russet brow,
And lift your tender eyelids, maid,
And brood on hopes and fears no more.
And no more turn aside and brood
Upon love's bitter mystery;
For Fergus rules the brazen cars,
And rules the shadows of the wood,
And the white breast of the dim sea
And all dishevelled wandering stars.

Shadowy, dim, dishevelled may unnerve us, but Yeats had more in mind. King Fergus of ancient Ulster, a hero and poet as well, abdicated to live in the woods. That gesture seized Yeats from early on. He cherished Irish myth, legend, folk imagination, and a tension was already pulling on him, between poetry and power, intellect and action, country and city. So he sets it all to music, entrusting life and nature to well-woven four-beat verse.

Celtic folk tradition never let Yeats go. At 23 he edited *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales* to breed popular consciousness. Fairies, ghosts, legendary heroes—he takes this fabulous world at face value. His entry on banshees, female spirits whose wild wailing portends a death, reports confidently that "at Dullahan" one of them hurled a bucket of blood in a peasant's face. (He adds a sort of proof: "Mr. and Mrs. S.C. Hall give the following notation of the banshee's cry," and there on a treble staff is a spine-chilling cry!)

KATHERINE EASTLAND

Throughout his half-century career, Irish places and place names bind Yeats to the landscape. In this ballad, "salley" is a willow tree:

Down by the salley gardens my love and I did meet;
She passed the salley gardens with little snow-white feet.
She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree;
But I, being young and foolish, with her would not agree.

First Yeats called this "An Old Song Resung," as it was "an extension of three lines sung to me by an old woman at Ballisodare." Enlisting in the tradition, he weaves his own words into a lilting Irish melody. What counts is popular lineage, rerooting him in native soil: "an old woman" sang "to me . . . at Ballisodare," a village near Sligo.

Place names—Sligo, Innisfree, Dullahan, Ballisodare, Coole, Ballylee, Drumcliff, Ben Bulben—charmed him no less than the natural scene behind them. Whereas Gerard Manley Hopkins fastened on organic detail, with Yeats our senses don't feel alerted to wind, moon, stream, lake, seashore, rock, woodland, tree, flower, bird. Instead, like William Blake (whose poems he published) and Thomas Hardy, he makes them symbols. Crickets singing and lake water lapping at Innisfree betoken peace, Fergus rules the sea and stars.

Nature served to offset politics, history, personal experience, especially after the Easter Rebellion when Irish nationalists revolted in Dublin. Britain executed the leaders, throwing Yeats into doubt over bravery and rashness, action, and decorum. "All changed, changed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born," runs the refrain in "Easter 1916." The poem asks if historic emergency ennobles or coarsens men and women, if zeal and fanaticism sacrifice human fineness. Yet one surprising stanza shifts away from politics. With brief lines turning on idiomatic rhymes, Yeats simply depicts "the living stream" and "birds that range / From cloud to tumbling cloud."

Minute by minute they change;
A shadow of cloud on the stream
Changes minute by minute;
A horse-hoof slides on the brim,
And a horse plashes within it;
The long-legged moor-hens dive,
And hens to moor-cocks call;
Minute by minute they live:
The stone's in the midst of all.

Because the stone of political monomania can only momentarily "trouble the living stream" of natural change, this one stanza needs no refrain claiming that "A terrible beauty is born." Hearty play between moor-cocks and moor-hens, changing yet unchanged, survives the convulsion that brought forth independent Eire.

Soon after Easter 1916, Yeats visited his friend Lady Gregory's Coole Park estate. The place reminds him

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how years before, when he was young, wild swans would

All suddenly mount
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
Upon their clamorous wings. . . .
Unwearied still, lover by lover,
They paddle in the cold
Companionable streams or climb the air.

The words catch a wild avian energy—"suddenly mount . . . scatter wheeling . . . clamorous wings . . . paddle in the cold . . . climb the air"—but the swans drive home a poet's loneliness: "I have looked upon those brilliant creatures, / And now my heart is sore." Years later, again remembering "sudden thunder of the mounting swan," Yeats finds "Another emblem there!"—"Nature's . . . a mirror of my mood."

Another brilliant bird turns emblem in Yeats's apocalypse "The Second Coming."

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.

He never practiced the noble sport of falconry, but if it offers such recognitions—

The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity

—so much the better. At any time, whatever one's take, those words may apply.

Once, during the unrest provoked by Irish rebellion, Yeats composed a perfect poem, "The Stare's Nest by My Window," balancing nature with history, birds and bees with firsthand human experience. "In the west of Ireland," he notes, "we call a starling a stare, and during the civil war, one built a nest in a hole in the masonry by my bedroom window." This time his refrain rounds off all four stanzas, moving from "honey-bees" through political mayhem toward a cry for regeneration, "O honey-bees, come build . . . "

The bees build in the crevices
Of loosening masonry, and there
The mother bird brings grubs and flies.
My wall is loosening; honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

We are closed in, and the key is turned
On our uncertainty; somewhere
A man is killed, or a house burned.
Yet no clear fact to be discerned:
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

A barricade of stone or of wood;
Some fourteen days of civil war:
Last night they trundled down the road
That dead young soldier in his blood:
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

We had fed the heart on fantasies,
The heart's grown brutal from the fare,
More substance in our enmities
Than in our love; O honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

Lines of terse idiom ending on a refrain, two rhymes per stanza with one of them always on "stare," telling detail ("loosening masonry," "grubs and flies") and anecdote (a "house burned," a soldier "trundled down the road") blending with broad confessional truths ("We are closed in . . . ," "We had fed the heart on fantasies . . . "), and finally that stark cry: "O honey-bees, / Come build in the empty house of the stare"—only a poet's lifelong quarrel with himself could bring it off.

As long as Yeats struggled to unite private, public, and visionary experience within a poem, he had to be questioning art itself. "Sailing to Byzantium" tests the saving grace of art against a touchstone of natural process, "Those dying generations."

The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.

He looks to art for a lasting shape that flesh can't deliver:

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling.

Somewhere he'd read of artisans setting a golden bird "upon a golden bough," nature transformed into art, and yet once there they sing

To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

Great art, yes, but still it sings of mortal nature, the changing stream of what's begotten, born, and dies—those spawning "salmon-falls," like the moor-hens calling moor-cocks in "Easter 1916."

Yeats's sense of mortality led to ever-stronger writing. In July 1936, with war looming, he wrote "Lapis Lazuli," prompted by the 18th-century Chinese stone a young poet had given him. First Yeats looks to tragic Hamlet and Lear for blazing joy. Then he turns to this deep-blue gemstone, a mountain scene with three men climbing, carved into lapis lazuli so that

Every discoloration of the stone,
Every accidental crack or dent,
Seems a water-course or an avalanche,
Or lofty slope where it still snows
Though doubtless plum or cherry-branch
Sweetens the little half-way house
Those Chinamen climb towards.

It's no small feat, turning accident into art and nature both. It takes guessing, imagining into the stone: "doubtless plum or cherry-branch." Then Yeats moves even deeper than possible into this carved lapis. One man "Carries a musical instrument," which is true, but another, we're told, "asks for mournful melodies," and "Their ancient, glittering eyes are gay."

Writing his own epitaph, W.B. Yeats turned death into art on the ground of a long-lived landscape. "Under Ben Bulben" takes its title from a mountain near Sligo where he spent his childhood. Embedding place-names in verse, the poem ends:

Under bare Ben Bulben's head
In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid.
An ancestor was rector there
Long years ago, a church stands near,
By the road an ancient cross.

No marble, no conventional phrase;
On limestone quarried near the spot
By his command these words are cut:
Cast a cold eye
On life, on death.
Horseman, pass by!

His own words—and "On limestone quarried near the spot." ♦

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Prey for Religion

'Radical secularism' and the weakening of the American spirit. **BY JAMES GRANT**

According to Gibbon, the two main reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire were barbarian invasions from without, and the triumph of Christianity from within. Christianity, by replacing the public good with a private one, fractured the unity of Rome's citizenry, leaving it weak and vulnerable to attack. As a result, he claimed, classical civilization was destroyed, and great works of literature and philosophy, such as those of Plato and Aristotle, were lost for centuries.

America's Secular Challenge
The Rise of a New National Religion
by Herbert London
Encounter, 100 pp., $20

Though unmentioned—for obvious reasons—in *America's Secular Challenge*, there is a striking similarity between Gibbon's assessment and Herbert London's analysis of the two-pronged threat that the West faces today; only this time, the threat from within is secularism, not Christianity. The core values of Western civilization, he argues, "are under siege not only from the external threat of radical Islam but also from the internal threats of spiritual fecklessness and moral anemia."

In challenging "the gospel of radical secularism," he claims secularism has caused a loss of confidence in the West, and has weakened public spirit, at a time when strength is most needed. "It may be too much to say America should be sacralised," he concludes, "but at the very least it must recognize and defend its religious heritage."

As becomes clear, "radical secularism" is used as a catchall term for moral relativism, socialism, "a cult of the self," indiscriminate tolerance, and an undermining of patriotism. With admirable skill, London ridicules each of these ideas, and though, at times, he is guilty of hyperbole—aren't we all?—I particularly welcomed his condemnation of the left bias in universities and the all-too-prevalent idea that truth varies from culture to culture. London is at his best when, paraphrasing Jefferson, he argues that "the ability to distinguish between good and evil was the main purpose of schooling and education." It is worrying, then, that educational institutions are the ones nurturing relativist ideas, and this book is a much-needed and refreshing rejoinder to these beliefs.

But I have difficulty seeing what these "tenets of secularism," as he calls them, have to do with secularism. Anticipating this criticism, London maintains that, "whatever the case, secularists show a greater reluctance to embrace and fight for positive values." So a lack of "positive values" in secularism seems to be his central thesis, out of which all else follows.

For London, president of the Hudson Institute, religion expresses certain moral truths that are "embodied in nature, and thus unchanging, regardless of context." (At the same time, he admits "some things are open to interpretation," and we all know where different interpretations of an apparently "absolute truth" can lead.) He prays "that secularists who preach relativism on our campuses and in our media will realize that Islamism's threat is real." Quite apart from the fact that this is not a problem exclusive to secular-minded institutions—it was, lest we forget, the archbishop of Canterbury who backed the introduction of aspects of *sharia* law in Britain-—just what, exactly, is secular about pandering to Islamists?

To his credit, London responds to Christopher Hitchens's challenge to "name one ethical statement made, or one ethical action performed, by a believer that could not have been uttered or done by a nonbeliever." His answer: The nonbeliever, when making a moral statement, owes a debt, albeit an unacknowledged one, to "a Western canon steeped in Christian doctrines." Hitchens, he says, is "captive to the West's Judeo-Christian ethics. Had he been born elsewhere in the world, his beliefs would likely look quite different—in no small part thanks to the mark left by religion on any culture." This seems to come close to the relativism he is ostensibly against. After all, cultural relativists claim that moral truths expressed in one culture are incapable of expression in another. This is exactly the kind of thought we need to break away from, that morality is situational, that Iran has a "different regime of truth," as Michel Foucault famously and fatuously contended.

Unfortunately, no elaboration is offered for his view that all moral statements are derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition. But the values that we take for granted today, and which are under attack from religious fanatics— those values of liberty and equality—were in fact obtained, little by little, during the struggle *against* the hegemony of organized religion.

In a world reverberating with religious barbarism, why we should want *more* religiosity, rather than less, is incomprehensible to me. The West's threat from within is a pervasive willingness to blame the West rather than the Islamic fascists. I cannot help but feel that London, by blaming secular liberal democracy at a time when it is most in need of defending, falls into the same trap. ♦

James Grant is a writer in Glasgow.

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Climate for Change

Lowering the temperature on global warming.

BY CHRISTY HALL ROBINSON

Among those daring enough to voice skepticism about global warming, most insist that the scientific evidence behind warnings about climate change is inadequate. Some assert that alarmism should not be allowed to prompt hasty policy decisions, particularly those with far-reaching, costly consequences.

Nigel Lawson, Britain's chancellor of the exchequer during the Thatcher years, is no exception. He is an outspoken skeptic about global warming. But in *An Appeal to Reason* he examines only briefly the problems he sees both with the science behind global warming and with the devastating economic impact of enacting international policies to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Instead, he chooses to "err on the side of caution," accepting the worst predictions of the effects of climate change at face value and offering a measured assessment of how we could—and even should—realistically respond to the threats.

An Appeal to Reason
A Cool Look at Global Warming
by Nigel Lawson
Overlook, 144 pp., $19.95

Lawson's conservative approach undercuts knee-jerk reactions by accepting the legitimacy of warming concerns. And acknowledging the seriousness of climate change warnings by discussing real policy solutions should ensure him the same treatment in turn. But this courtesy, he notes, is rarely extended to those in the doubting camp: Scientists and politicians who express skepticism about global warming are treated as heretics for questioning the received wisdom: "[I]ndeed, I have been able to write this book only because my own career is behind me," he says.

He is, as he emphasizes, not a scientist—and his approach also demonstrates a sense of what is appropriate for him to undertake. But he is more than credentialed to talk about implementing policy and, at the outset, he articulates exactly what is at issue—surprisingly easy to lose sight of—for policymakers addressing climate change: "What has been the rise in global mean temperatures over the past hundred years; why we believe this has occurred; how much, on this basis, are temperatures likely to rise over the next hundred years; and what are the consequences likely to be."

Acknowledging that "the twentieth century ended slightly warmer than it began" (by 1.3 degrees Fahrenheit), Lawson points out that there has been no significant warming since the beginning of this century. This cessation was not predicted by the computer models that experts rely on for forecasts of future warming. Predictions have been adjusted to account for the pause, and warming is now expected to resume next year. But, says Lawson, "we shall see" whether it does.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)—"far and away the most authoritative and influential" of existing climate change organizations, according to Lawson—predicts in its latest report that, by 2100, the global average temperature will have risen between 3.2 degrees and 7.2 degrees Fahrenheit. The general consensus for preventing this predicted warming is to enact policies that force the reduction of man-made carbon dioxide emissions, which create a greenhouse effect in the atmosphere. But the cost of mitigation would be extraordinary because of global reliance on carbon-based energy.

According to the IPCC, stabilizing "CO_2-equivalent concentrations in the atmosphere" at 535–590 parts per million by volume (currently around 430) by 2050 could cost up to 4 percent "of that year's global GDP." Mitigation would have an enormously negative effect on developed economies and would cause a serious setback for emerging nations—in the unlikely event that they agree to emissions reduction targets—because carbon-based energy is a major factor in rapidly growing their economies.

Even if the global average temperature increases by 7.2 degrees—the upper end of the IPCC's range—is it worth wreaking havoc on the global economy to prevent a level of warming to which we could adapt in the course of a century? Lawson suggests that a wiser and more plausible approach is "autonomous adaptation, buttressed where necessary with positive policy measures to assist it."

If policy action were taken now in the interest of future generations, it would be unprecedented, Lawson says, pointing out that protecting against projected catastrophe and loss of human life in future centuries has never been the responsibility of today's policymakers.

"Is there something so special about global warming," he asks, "that it should receive this exceptionally lenient treatment?" Environmental concerns, while appropriate and of great importance, are "no excuse for abandoning reason," and Lawson offers his "appeal to reason" to people who "have not yet made up their minds" about global warming.

A slender volume written in a refreshingly rational—even reasonable!—manner, *An Appeal to Reason* is an excellent resource for anyone who wants a brief, logical education on the issues surrounding the rhetoric of climate change, and the implications of proposed cures. ♦

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Box Office Nectar

These movies are making Hollywood millions—and without explosions. **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

The most discussed box office story of the summer was the enormous success of *The Dark Knight*, the Batman movie that, we were told incessantly, has made more money than any film in history besides *Titanic*.

Only, in point of fact, it hasn't. The only honest way to compare the grosses of *The Dark Knight* with those of past blockbusters is to measure them in constant dollars. By that standard, *The Dark Knight*'s $500 million in domestic box office places it a mere 29th on the all-time box office list; it is bested, surprisingly, by movies like *The Sting*, *Thunderball*, and *Grease*. (Using this method of measurement, by the way, *Titanic* is only the sixth most popular film of all time; *Gone with the Wind* actually tops the list with earnings of $1.4 billion in 2008 dollars, followed by *Star Wars*, *The Sound of Music*, *E.T.*, and, of all things, *The Ten Commandments*.)

In the end, then, *The Dark Knight* really isn't all that meaningful a cultural phenomenon; it is merely the latest in a series of profitable comic-book movies, following in the wake of the three Spider-Man pictures. Nonetheless, it is *The Dark Knight* that has been the subject of dozens of breathless works of illiterate financial analysis, while the most culturally meaningful and interesting trend of the summer has gone undiscussed.

Two movies released in the past few months have actually earned more as a return on investment than *The Dark Knight* or any other film this year. They are *Sex and the City* and *Mamma Mia!* and they are not movies aimed at the supposedly golden audience of young males between the ages of 12 and 34. These are films about women either approaching middle age or smack-dab in the grip of it, and the only way a teenage boy would have seen even a minute of them is if he took a wrong turn in the multiplex lobby after a trip to the bathroom.

Mamma Mia! has earned $140 million in the United States, and will probably finish its run in the theaters with an overall gross of $160-$175 million. Even more impressive, its worldwide gross is $300 million. So, by the time it hits DVD, it will have made somewhere around $550 million, or 10 times its production cost of $52 million. By contrast, *The Dark Knight* will earn $1 billion worldwide, dwarfing *Mamma Mia!* Except that *The Dark Knight* cost just shy of $200 million, which means that it will have earned five times its production cost. Strictly as a matter of return on investment, *Mamma Mia!* will prove to be one of the most profitable movies ever made.

Sex and the City has brought in $150 million here at home and $240 million internationally so far, and will top out over $400 million total. That is seven times its production cost of $65 million, which means it is not as dramatic a success as *Mamma Mia!* but still a colossal triumph.

Both movies, to be sure, came with ready-made audiences. *Sex and the City* was based on a popular television series, while *Mamma Mia!* is the film version of a phenomenally successful stage show featuring songs by the 1970s Swedish pop band ABBA and a plotline lifted baldly from the 1968 comedy *Buona Sera, Mrs. Campbell*. Most movies deriving from TV programs have failed over the past decade, most recently an *X-Files* film that cost $30 million and has made, worldwide, a grand total of $29 million. The only adaptation of a Broadway musical to score even modest success in the past five years is *Hairspray*; most others have done disastrously, as was the case with *Rent*, *The Producers*, and *Phantom of the Opera* (which, like *MM!*, was already a worldwide brand when it was brought to the screen).

No, what is notable, and important, about these two profoundly forgettable and unimportant films is that they are an unmistakable indication of a market-altering fact: Women, particularly women above the teenage years, are motion-picture ticket buyers, and if movies are made for them, they will make studios and producers rich beyond their wildest dreams.

For decades, Hollywood has resisted this idea. Marketing executives believe that, while women will agree to attend the films their boyfriends and husbands want to see, men will not return the favor. Therefore, a movie made and marketed to males has a decent chance of getting females in the seats, while a movie made for women will be bereft of a male audience. And since, it has long been believed, women will not go to movies on their own and without a significant other, the financial deck is stacked against them.

Most of this wisdom is demonstrably true. But there is a new wrinkle. Just as teenage boys will travel in a pack on opening night to see *The Dark Knight*, and return in yet another pack again and again, women in their thirties, forties, and fifties are showing similar tendencies with movies that appeal to them. They don't form a pack; it's more like a book club outing.

I hated *Sex and the City* and loved *Mamma Mia!* to distraction—it's like a menopausal *Beach Blanket Bingo* with Meryl Streep instead of Annette Funicello. To call these movies fluff is to insult the Fluffernutter. But the knowledge, to which Hollywood must surely and at last be opening itself, that movies made for women are a decent bet, is a welcome development for anyone who thinks films should have a plot and tell a story that remotely resembles real life. ♦

John Podhoretz, editorial director of Commentary, *is* THE WEEKLY STANDARD*'s movie critic.*

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"Senate Democrats hinted at payback Thursday for Sen. Joe Lieberman, who called Barack Obama an untested candidate beholden to Democratic interest groups in a prime-time Republican National Convention address. . . . A spokesman for Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., indicated Thursday that Lieberman may no longer be welcome."

— Associated Press, *September 4, 2008*

EPTEMBER 16, 2008

'Let Me Be Clear: Nobody Puts Joe in the Corner'

Democrats Accused of Bullying Independent Lieberman

By DAN BALZ
Washington Post Staff Writer

Following Sen. Joseph Lieberman's address to the Republican National Convention, Senate Democrats warned of political retribution after the November elections. But few Democrats could even wait for Election Day to exact their revenge.

Last Monday, Lieberman's staff arrived at their Capitol Hill office and found it thoroughly toilet-papered. "It was good quality toilet paper, too," noted one aide, who for his own safety asked to remain nameless. "That suggests to me it wasn't staffers but actual senators using their own soft two-ply brand." Spotted in the vicinity was Sen. Charles Schumer, who said he was running off to cast his vote (though Congress was not in session that day).

The situation, however, became noticeably worse for Lieberman on Tuesday, when the Connecticut senator entered the members' dining room. As he sat in his chair, a whoopie cushion sounded beneath him. "Must be the Navy bean soup!" laughed Sen. Robert Byrd, who then claimed someone had placed a whoopie cushion under his own seat. None was found.

Later that afternoon, Lieberman went to the Senate gym. In the changing room he encountered Sens. Harry Reid and Richard Durbin. Both men started to towel-whip Mr. Lieberman and then tried forcing him inside his own locker until Sen. Jim Bunning arrived, armed with a baseball bat. When asked about the incident, Mr. Reid replied, "It was all in good fun." Mr. Durbin, on the other hand, said, "Joe was lucky. We would've gotten him good if Bunning hadn't started swinging."

"Childish and immature" was how Lieberman described the incidents. In a phone interview yesterday, Mr. Lieberman complained about a "kick me" sign taped to his back, milk in his salt shaker, and Saran wrap placed on the office toilet seat. "What's next?" he asked. "Are they going to short sheet me?" He also claims Sen. Christopher Dodd flung a forkful of hash browns at him during a breakfast meeting. "Let me be clear: Nobody puts Joe in the corner," said the defiant senator. "Now if you'll excuse me, I need to untangle chewing gum from my hair." Mr. Dodd insists he was just his clumsy self, adding that he also spilled his glass of Bloody

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North American International Auto Show

Sen. Joseph Lieberman, I-CT, asks reporters for tips on removing gum from hair.

Brady To Return Bionic

Coach hopes for 'Better, Stronger, Faster' QB

By LIZ CLARKE
Washington Post Staff Writer

BOSTON, Sept. 15 — In a stun-ing press conference, Patriots coach ll Belichick announced that Tom dy, the three-time Super Bowl ill undergo a series

"Gentlemen, we can rebuild him," said Belichick. "We have the technology. We have the capability to make the world's first bionic man. Tom Brady will be that man. Better than he was before. Better, stronger, faster." Belichick assured reporters that Brady's [illegible] good looks, however,

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